

THE CAMBRIDGE  
HISTORY OF  
PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE  
NINETEENTH  
CENTURY  
(1790–1870)



EDITED BY  
ALLEN W. WOOD  
SONGSUK SUSAN HAHN

## THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1790–1870)

The latest volume in the Cambridge History of Philosophy series, *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century (1790–1870)* brings together twenty-nine leading experts in the field and covers the years 1790–1870. Their twenty-eight chapters provide a comprehensive survey of the period, organizing the material topically. After a brief editor's introduction, the book begins with three chapters surveying the background of nineteenth-century philosophy; followed by two on logic and mathematics; two on nature and natural science; four on mind, language, and culture, including psychology, the human sciences, and aesthetics; four on ethics; three on religion; seven on society, including chapters on the French Revolution, the decline of natural right, political economy, and social discontent; and three on history, dealing with historical method, speculative theories of history, and the history of philosophy. The volume concludes with an extensive list of references.

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# The Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century (1790–1870)

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## PREFACE

Like the other volumes of the Cambridge History of Philosophy, this one attempts to provide a comprehensive account of philosophy during the period it covers, focusing on the European philosophical tradition. But it both begins earlier and ends earlier than the title “Nineteenth Century” would suggest. The starting point is 1790, which roughly coincides with the rise of post-Kantian philosophy in Germany and reactions to the French Revolution throughout Europe. It ends about 1870, well before the end of the nineteenth century proper. In this respect, the period covered, and especially its *terminus ad quem*, has been chosen to coordinate with the Cambridge History of Philosophy series as a whole. The volume covers the period in which movements such as German idealism, Young Hegelianism, Marxism, Darwinism, positivism, utilitarianism, and Scottish common sense philosophy characterized the philosophical landscape. This volume does not try to cover a number of figures and movements that began in the late nineteenth century and carried over into the twentieth – such as Husserl, Mach, pragmatism, British idealism, and both Marburg and Southwest German neo-Kantianism.

The present volume, therefore, might be thought of as the history of early and middle nineteenth-century philosophy. Yet wherever authors of individual articles felt they must go further in order to complete the story they think needs to be told, they have been encouraged to do so. Also, we take responsibility for covering the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), because it is hard to conceive of a treatment of nineteenth-century philosophy that would exclude his reflections on such important topics of nineteenth-century philosophy as art, morality, and history.

Like other volumes in this Cambridge series, this one is not organized around the exposition of a few “great” philosophers, or even around movements or national traditions, but instead attempts to identify a number of themes, topics, and concerns characteristic of its period and to exhibit them as they were seen and treated from a variety of different but representative standpoints. One difficulty with doing this in the period we are covering, however, is that the



nineteenth century was a time in which philosophy began to view itself in terms of traditions, even national traditions: this was the period that began to think of the history of philosophy in precisely the way that the Cambridge History now wants to leave behind. This fact, too, will need to be taken account of in our treatments of the themes around which the history is organized. This self-limitation of the Cambridge histories is motivated chiefly by the need to focus on a coherent historical narrative that can be presented with reasonable thoroughness in the space of a single volume.

This volume has been a long time in preparation. Some of the authors have had to wait a long time, along with the editors, for others to finish their work. The original conception and plan were mine, and Songsuk Susan Hahn joined me as coeditor fairly late in the process. But during the last three years of work on this volume she took primary responsibility for dealing with authors, recruiting new authors to fill gaps in the plan, and working as editor with a number of authors. Without her intellectual energy, knowledge of the period, and editorial skill, this volume would probably never have been completed. Laurel Scotland-Stewart and Alan McLuckie also performed important editorial tasks and deserve significant credit for the book's completion. The editors would also like to thank Charles Parsons, Alexander Rueger, Stephen Menn, and Frederick Neuhouser for helpful comments on articles by other authors. Rueger also did invaluable work on the general reference list.

Allen W. Wood

# INTRODUCTION

ALLEN W. WOOD

Nineteenth-century philosophy witnessed the development of intellectual projects and movements for whose invention the eighteenth century deserves primary credit. It might even be said that it was largely constituted by the fruition of such projects. Both empiricism and German idealism were essentially products of the Enlightenment: empiricism was born of a creative reading of the moderately skeptical rationalist philosopher John Locke, mainly by French and Scottish philosophers such as Étienne Bonnot de Condillac and David Hume. Just as Condillac attempted to treat the theory of knowledge as a natural discipline based on the psychological investigation of the human senses, so Hume thought to apply to metaphysical and epistemological subjects the same method that had been seen to have such great success, applied to nature as a whole in Newton's physics. German idealism was the attempt to fulfill – usually by “going beyond” – the project of transcendental philosophy invented by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). But whereas Kant devised the transcendental approach as a way of responding to problems of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – problems about the roles of reason and experience in knowledge and the recognition of the limits of metaphysical cognition – his immediate followers saw this approach as opening up a new kind of philosophical method, a new and radical answer to an equally radical skepticism by which they felt knowledge was threatened, and at the same time as an invitation to a new and higher kind of scientific systematicity than philosophers had hitherto known.

The truly revolutionary figure here was Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), who devised a new “synthetic method” of transcendental inquiry that overcame what he and his contemporaries viewed as the false and artificial “dualisms” – between sense and understanding, reason and empirical desire, theory and practice – that Kant had set up and had even attempted to mediate in his third critique, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). Fichte's approach was the gateway to later “speculative” systems and also to a variety of criticisms of

systematic philosophy, which also emerged out of Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment approaches that arose in the middle to late eighteenth century.

At the end of the eighteenth century, in fact, there were a number of widely differing conceptions of philosophy and its relation to Common Sense, the sciences, and social practice. One strain in Enlightenment thought rejected the idea that philosophy should constitute itself as an esoteric or specialized discipline and favored the idea that it should devote itself to the task of public education, with a view to directly improving cultural and political conditions. Even when philosophy was thought of as reflective inquiry, there were those such as Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) and the Scottish common sense philosophers who thought that philosophy ought to be rooted in ordinary life or common sense and opposed a “scientific” or “systematic” conception of its vocation. Yet others saw philosophy as a fundamental science capable of grounding all the sciences, but of this science there were widely differing conceptions, some speculative, others empiricist, such as French *idéologie*, others critical. The Kantian revolution itself gave rise to a variety of attempts to complete or correct the Kantian system: K. L. Reinhold’s *Elementarlehre*, Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, and the speculative philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854) and G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). A survey of the “Kantian aftermath” is presented by Robert B. Pippin in Chapter 1 of this volume.

In the early nineteenth century, philosophy was related in a variety of ways to social, educational, state, and private institutions. In the seventeenth century, the forefront of philosophical activity was situated outside the academy, but by the end of the eighteenth century, philosophy was once again centered in the universities, at least on the Continent and in Scotland. Until the late nineteenth century, the center of much philosophy in England and the United States was still nonacademic. Other official institutions supported it as well, such as the French Institut National and the Prussian Royal Academy. There were also unofficial institutions, such as the salons of Mme. de Stael, Mme. Helvetius, Rahel Levin, and Johanna Schopenhauer. Under this heading, we should also include the publication and dissemination of ideas in philosophical, literary, and political journals and reviews, such as the *Revue philosophique*, the *Athenäum*, the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, and the *Westminster Review*, some of which were the center of important philosophical movements. In Chapter 2, Terry Pinkard treats the institutional context of nineteenth-century philosophy, with special attention to the German university system.

As in other volumes in the Cambridge History of Philosophy series, “philosophy” refers mainly to European philosophy. In the nineteenth century, however, European imperialism had resulted in contact with non-European cultures and ideas, which began to have an impact on European philosophy.

Interest in the theme of cultural diversity and its moral, political, and philosophical implications really began in the eighteenth century, with thinkers such as Rousseau and Herder, and it was given much impetus by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) and his students, including the explorers Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) and Friedrich Hornemann (1772–1801).

Philosophically, this interest came to fruition only much later: the first major history of philosophy to give an important place to non-Western philosophy was *General History of Philosophy* (1894–1917) by Paul Deussen (1845–1919). Yet as Michael N. Forster discusses in Chapter 28, historians of philosophy, such as Gladisch and Röth, had included “oriental” philosophy in their histories even earlier. The religious aspect of Indian thought had an early impact, as in *Language and Wisdom of India* (1808) by Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) and *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). As Edward Said has shown in his books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, exoticism was a persistent theme in nineteenth-century literature. And nineteenth-century European thought developed numerous theories of race and culture. Racism is a perceptible ingredient in the European philosophy of this period and central to the thought of men such as Joseph Gobineau (1816–82). The most significant phenomenon in early-nineteenth-century philosophy was the German idealist movement. From the start it saw itself as a movement in process, seeking the definitive systematic form proper to philosophy. Initiated by Fichte, who responded to the skepticism of Salomon Maimon (1753–1800) and Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761–1833) and the critical “philosophy of elements” by Karl Leonard Reinhold (1757–1833), German idealism developed through Schelling’s philosophy of nature and speculative system of identity and reached its culmination in the mature system of Hegel.

Alternatives to the movement of systematic German idealism can be found later in Schopenhauer, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), Sir William Hamilton (1805–65), and Rudolph Hermann Lotze (1817–81). A second important and sharply contrasting philosophical trend of the period is positivism, both in Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and in other empiricists, who had quite distinctive views on such topics as the a priori and naturalistic approaches to epistemology. John Stuart Mill (1806–73) also had a systematic approach to philosophy and distinctive motivations for thinking that systematicity was important to philosophy. This, too, would be a place in which to consider systematic “theories of knowledge,” such as those developed by Friedrich Eduard Beneke (1798–1854) and Antoine Augustin Cournot (1801–77).

Quite a different conception of the relationship of philosophy to ordinary consciousness can be found among the Scottish common sense philosophers – Thomas Reid (1710–96), James Oswald (1703–93), Dugald Stewart

(1753–1828) – and their French followers, Pierre–Paul Royer–Collard (1763–1845) and Victor Cousin (1792–1867); and the Harvard philosophers in the United States took a contrasting approach, but with similar aims and also influenced by Scottish common sense philosophy; the same philosophical impulse is found earlier in the German counter–Enlightenment thought of F. H. Jacobi. The claims of philosophical reason were also regarded as problematic in relation to social tradition by Romantic and conservative thinkers: Edmund Burke (1729–97), Louis Gabriel Ambroise Bonald (1754–1840), August Wilhelm Rehberg (1757–1836), Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), and Hugues Lammenais (1782–1854).

Criticisms of philosophical systematicity by Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) and Friedrich Nietzsche might also be considered. In America, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) was a critic of systematic philosophy. The very idea of a philosophical system, however, was challenged at the end of the eighteenth century by philosophers such as Jacobi, Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88), and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), and these challenges were taken up by later antisystematic philosophers. Systematic philosophy in the German idealist tradition, and challenges to them, are discussed by Rolf–Peter Horstmann in Chapter 3.

## LOGIC AND MATHEMATICS

At the end of the eighteenth century, Kant could still regard Aristotelian logic as an unproblematic and complete (forever closed) body of theory. Between Kant and the revolution in logic accomplished by Frege, Russell, and others who came after the period covered by this history, there were a number of thinkers such as Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848), George Boole (1815–64), Augustus De Morgan (1806–71), and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) who made significant contributions to the coming revolution. Alongside them were philosophers who contributed in one way or another to broadening the subject matter of logic, rendering it problematic and thereby open to revolutionary revision: not only Hamilton, Mill, Adolf, Lotze, Trendelenburg (1802–72), and Christoph von Sigwart (1830–1904), but even Fichte and Hegel may be considered in this light. These nineteenth–century attempts to rethink logic are treated in Chapter 4 by Jeremy Heis.

The nineteenth century was also a creative period in the history of mathematics. Carl Friedrich Gauss (1777–1855), Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky (1792–1856), and János Bolyai (1802–60) recognized the independence of the parallel postulate, pointing the way to non–Euclidean geometries by Bernhard Riemann (1826–66) and Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–94) and forcing

revisions in the standard philosophical treatments of geometry (by Kant, for example). Both C. S. Peirce and his father, Benjamin Peirce (1809–80), contributed to thinking about mathematics. Significant work in the foundations of mathematics was done by Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848), Augustin-Louis Cauchy (1789–1857), Leopold Kronecker (1823–91), Karl Weierstrass (1815–97), and Richard Dedekind (1831–1916). Also important were developments in probability theory, from those of Pierre Simon LaPlace (1749–1827) to those of John Venn (1834–1923). In Chapter 5, Janet Folina discusses these significant nineteenth-century developments in the philosophy of mathematics.

## NATURE

Much philosophy in the nineteenth century is preoccupied with either natural science or philosophy's relationship to it. At the end of the eighteenth century, an educated person could still keep abreast of the current state of all the empirical sciences. Hence it was still possible to entertain the hope that a single philosopher might synthesize their results into a comprehensive philosophical system. Such syntheses were undertaken, in very different ways, by Schelling and Jean Louis Cabanis (1816–1906), among others. But sometime early in the century, the increasing specialization of the sciences made this no longer possible. It is significant that the very concept of "science" (*scientia*) underwent a change during this period, shedding the Aristotelian-Scholastic connotations it had retained even in altered forms in philosophers from Descartes to Hegel, and came to be understood in the way we have now come to understand it in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As a sign of this change, the word "scientist" itself was coined in the first half of the nineteenth century by William Whewell (1794–1866).

This profound change went pretty much unnoticed by systematic philosophers such as Hegel, but it accounts in part for the decline in the influence of Hegelian philosophy (which had begun even before Hegel's death in 1831). This led, on the one hand, to the idea that philosophy was itself some kind of specialized discipline, operating alongside the special sciences, and, on the other, to the notion that it perhaps lay "beneath" them, providing their epistemological or transcendental foundations. Whewell was one of the first who attempted a reconceptualization of "science" that might be adequate to the new cultural reality of scientific specialization.

That approach played an important role in the resurgence of Kantian (or neo-Kantian) philosophy in the middle and late nineteenth century. Another manifestation of it was the attempt to merge philosophy into the special science of human psychology that was in the process of being invented during this

period. (In psychologistic versions of neo-Kantianism we see both tendencies operating at once.) This close association of philosophy with psychology, or “mental philosophy,” persisted throughout the nineteenth century and even lasted into the twentieth. On the other hand, in some quarters the success of the special sciences led to the idea that “philosophy” as a whole was an out-dated and discredited pseudodiscipline, destined to be replaced by the positive sciences.

At the same time, developments in the special sciences themselves were to have an important philosophical impact. Among these are the work of Antoine Lavoisier (1743–94) in chemistry, John Brown (1735–88) in medicine, William Herschel (1738–1822) in astronomy, and John Clerk Maxwell (1831–79) and Ludwig Boltzmann (1844–1906) in physics, various results challenging the notion that all natural processes could be reduced to a mechanistic corpuscularian physics, and, of course, the revolution in biology associated with Charles Darwin (1809–82), which affected the way people thought about many things, including life, natural kinds, and the relation of nature to history. The scientific work of Goethe also had significant philosophical influence. German idealism tried to develop a systematic philosophy of nature. A contrasting approach was found in the scientific materialism of Ludwig Büchner (1824–99), Jacob Moleschott (1822–93), Karl Vogt (1817–18), and Heinrich Czolbe (1819–73). An attempt to synthesize the two is found in Friedrich Engels (1821–95). Among philosophical conceptions of science were German idealism’s “philosophy of nature,” the antiphilosophical materialism of Büchner, the positivism of Comte, and the beginnings of a modern philosophy of science based on its history and practice, which we also find in Whewell. This is one of the headings under which we should also consider Darwinism and its influence on the conceptions of science held by such figures as Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and Chauncey Wright (1830–75). Another strikingly common view is some version of vitalism or panpsychism (which could be considered an extension of the approach of Spinoza and Leibniz), in which even “dead” nature is in some sense really living or spiritual. Such views can be found in different forms in Schopenhauer, Lotze, and Gustav Fechner (1801–87).

The very scope of what counts as “nature” begins to expand as geology and biology come to be seen as dealing with distinctive natural forms. In early modern philosophy and science, there was a strong movement to conceive of human beings as part of the natural world as portrayed in mechanistic physics. This was continued in the nineteenth century by Cabanis and the ideologues, and later by proponents of scientific materialism, such as Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919). Reacting against such a picture, German idealism developed a concept of the human being as essentially embodied, as part of a natural world,

whose essence, however, was organic rather than mechanistic, and ultimately spiritual in nature. The Romantics developed this idea in a subjectivistic-aesthetic direction, seeing nature as material for imaginative transformation. For common sense philosophy, in both its Scottish and French versions, an important issue was how to find a place for freedom and spirituality; this was also important to later philosophers. Lotze is especially significant in this connection. Schopenhauer developed an original and influential way of conceiving of human nature as grounded in the will, a metaphysical reality that is vital, physiological, and irrational. Darwinism, as represented by Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95) and John Fiske (1842–1901), also had an obvious and controversial impact on the way human beings were seen as part of nature. A contrasting interpretation of the implications of Darwin is found in Helmholtz and Emil du Bois-Reymond (1818–96). Nineteenth-century conceptions of nature are treated by Alexander Rueger in Chapter 6, while the sciences of nature are discussed by Philippe Huneman in Chapter 7.

#### MIND, LANGUAGE, AND CULTURE

In the wake of Condillac's sensationalism, Humean skepticism, and Kant's transcendental idealism, it was natural that nineteenth-century philosophy should be concerned with replies to skepticism and issues about how the mind knows the world and issues about the dependence of the object of knowledge on its subject or its independence of the subject. The first problem concerned common sense philosophers; the second, the ideologues and François-Pierre-Gonthier Maine de Biran (1766–1824); the third, the German idealists and other post-Kantian philosophers, such as Herbart and Schopenhauer. Questions here are partly in the field of epistemology as traditionally conceived, but what must be emphasized is the way that the whole conception of a "theory of knowledge" was being radically transformed in the nineteenth century.

The nature of self-awareness and selfhood is a principal theme in the early nineteenth century – especially with an emphasis on volition and agency as revelatory of the self. This is seen in Fichte and his idealist followers, in the ideologues and Maine de Biran, and in Reid's conception of the "active powers" of the self. Central to topics about the self is the conception of freedom, which was basic to the whole German idealist tradition. Fichte initiated a radical revolution in the Cartesian conception of the self, and Schopenhauer's conception of will and its later development by Nietzsche called into question the possibility of human freedom and self-knowledge.

Perhaps the most important development in nineteenth-century thought in this area, however, was a development already mentioned: the emergence



of psychology as a special field of scientific endeavor is treated here by Gary Hatfield in Chapter 8. The science of psychology was often conceived physiologically, as by Ernst Henrich Weber (1795–1878), Georg Elias Müller (1850–1934), Fechner, and Helmholtz. But it was also sometimes related to the older, introspective “empirical psychology,” regarded as a part of philosophy itself, and even as playing a fundamental role in philosophical inquiry. Psychology was a major theme among philosophers, such as Herbart, Beneke, and Lotze; others, such as Dugald Stewart and John Stuart Mill, wrote on psychology as part of their theories of mind.

The nature of language was first focused on as a central philosophical problem in the early nineteenth century, despite anticipations found earlier in Locke, Leibniz, Condillac, Hamann, and Herder. This can be seen in the ideologues – Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836); Constantin François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney (1757–1820); Marie-Joseph Degerando (1772–1842); and Cabanis, but also in Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), Otto Friedrich Gruppe (1804–76), Alexander Johnson (1786–1867), Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), and John Stuart Mill. In Chapter 9, Michael N. Forster treats the origins of a new approach to language, arising from Hamann’s and Herder’s reflections in the eighteenth century, and later bearing fruit in the work of Humboldt, Schlegel, Mill, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923), and Gottlob Frege (1848–1925).

It was one of the nineteenth century’s proudest perceptions of itself that, in contrast to the preceding century, it had begun to understand human nature in a cultural and historical context. Ernst Cassirer has shown that this perception underestimates the extent to which the nineteenth century was merely using what had been given it by the Enlightenment, but the investigation of human nature and the methodology of the human sciences were surely major themes in nineteenth-century thought. Many distinctive conceptions of the human sciences arose and flourished during this time: Hegel’s, Mill’s, and Marx’s, to name just three. The German term *Geisteswissenschaften*, widely used for such studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was coined by F. M. Schiele (for the English term “human sciences”) in his 1849 translation of Mill’s *System of Logic*. The rise of the human sciences in the nineteenth century is treated by Rudolf A. Makkreel in Chapter 10.

One major concern of nineteenth-century thought in the realm of culture was the role of art in human life. It is no coincidence that a natural point at which to begin the period is the year in which Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* was published. Very soon Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), Schelling, Schlegel, Schopenhauer, and Hegel all related art in

various ways to vital questions in metaphysics, morality, religion, and politics. Nineteenth-century aesthetics is discussed in Chapter 11 by Paul Guyer.

## ETHICS

Following Kant, an important tradition in early-nineteenth-century ethical thought took rational self-legislation or the actualization of selfhood or individuality to be the basis of morality. The rise of a “positive” conception of freedom is important here. There were contrasting views, however, arising from different conceptions of the self and its freedom and self-actualization. Thinkers differed over the respective roles of reason and feeling in selfhood (the critique of Kant by Schiller and Hegel) and over the importance of individual differences and peculiarities in actualizing the self (the critique of Kant by Schleiermacher and the Romantics). Many of these ideas provide the background for Kierkegaard’s conception of the ethical life and of the problematic self as subject to despair. There is a perceptible influence of this tradition on Mill’s conception of the value of individuality and on the modifications he makes in utilitarian ethical theory. The role of selfhood in nineteenth-century ethics is explored by Bernard Reginster in Chapter 12.

Another main focus of ethics in the nineteenth century was the relation of moral conduct to the collective good of human beings or the health of the social order. This theme is explored by John Skorupski in Chapter 13. This was the chief concern of the utilitarian tradition, from Jeremy Bentham to Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900). But it was also dealt with by a strong “communitarian” strain in German ethical theory (Fichte, Hegel, and the Romantics) and the British idealists Thomas Hill Green (1836–82) and Francis Herbert Bradley (1846–1924). The social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer provides yet another perspective on this theme, along with responses to it by such figures late in the period as Chauncey Wright and John Dewey (1859–1952).

Nineteenth-century philosophers discussed several issues about the epistemic status of moral principles and about how moral truths are known. Some held that morality is founded on an *a priori* principle, while others held that its basis is empirical. German moral philosophers such as Kant, Fichte, and Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843) defended the claim that conscience is “infallible” but gave it radically different interpretations. In Britain, the debate between utilitarians and intuitionists over the source of moral knowledge provided the background for Sidgwick’s treatment of such topics. Moral intuitionism was also developed by the American transcendentalists. The relation of morality to culture and issues surrounding moral differences and relativity were raised

during this period as well. Nineteenth-century moral epistemology is treated in Chapter 14, coauthored by J. B. Schneewind and me.

It is platitudinous to say that the nineteenth century was the heyday of the idea of progress. It is also true that for many leading thinkers of the period, the thesis that the human race is in some sense progressing plays an important role in their conception of morality. Hegel's theory of the modern state and Mill's social theory, as well as future-oriented social views of Comte and the utopian socialists, belong here. Among them there are not only different conceptions of what "progress" consists in but also different views about how certain it is that it is taking place and about what moral conclusions should be drawn from it.

Along with the idea of moral progress, however, were radical philosophical attacks on morality itself. I explore several prominent ones in Chapter 15. Clearly the most famous antimoralist was Nietzsche, but he has a number of nineteenth-century predecessors, such as Hegel, Schlegel, Max Stirner (the pen name of Johann Kaspar Schmidt, 1806–56), and Karl Marx (1818–83). Starting from the generally Kantian conception of the individual as bound only by self-legislation, Schlegel and Stirner raise far-reaching questions about the claims of morality over us, while Hegel and Marx consider the social roots of moral thinking and its limitations in relation to historical agency. Nietzsche's critique of morality adds a psychological dimension drawn from Schopenhauer's theory of the will and the irrational processes through which it manipulates our conscious life.

## RELIGION

Until the second half of the eighteenth century, the chief rationalistic challenges to religion, as represented by Spinoza, Voltaire, Kant, and such movements as socinianism, deism, and neologism, did not question the fundamental truth or value of religion but remained in an important sense internal to religious thought. Overtly atheistic or agnostic challenges to religion first arose among the French *philosophes* and other Enlightenment thinkers such as Hume. In the nineteenth century, however, these more radical challenges began to take many forms and were supported by a variety of metaphysical, moral, and political motivations – among ideologues, utilitarians, Young Hegelians, positivists, Marxian socialists, scientific materialists, and Darwinian evolutionists. *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72), Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*, and Nietzsche's radical attack on the whole of Christian culture belong here. Van A. Harvey discusses radical nineteenth-century critiques of religion in Chapter 16.

Thomas Carlyle described his century as “an age destitute of faith, but terrified of skepticism.” Alongside the proliferation of overtly antireligious thought about religion were the beginnings of religious “modernism” – the attempt to modify either religious thinking itself or at least the way religious belief and activity are viewed philosophically, so as to render it consistent with a modern and scientific worldview. This can be seen as the main thrust of German idealism’s thinking about religion, including that of Fichte, Hegel, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, which sometimes borrowed from the heterodoxy of Spinoza and the mysticism of Jakob Böhme (1575–1624). Though it takes a different (generally less radical) form, the apologetic reconception of religious belief is an important theme in Scottish common sense philosophy and French eclecticism. This is probably also the most natural place to treat American transcendentalism, as well as American figures such as William Ellery Channing (1780–1842) and C. S. Peirce’s thought about religion in the 1880s. In Chapter 17, Stephen Crites explores three types of speculative religion that arose in the nineteenth century.

There is no sharp dividing line between those who tried to save religion by rethinking it and those who defended it by rejecting the modern assaults on it. Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard, for example, are not easy to classify according to this distinction. But there were clearly those, usually with motives simultaneously religious and political, who thought that the central issue raised by the French Revolution was religious and regarded the defense of traditional Christian culture as the basis of their political commitment to oppose what the Revolution stood for. Some important thinkers who fit this description are Burke, Bonald, de Maistre, Lammenais, Friedrich Schlegel, Adam Müller (1779–1829), and Karl Ludwig von Haller (1768–1854). American defenders of religion such as Noah Porter (1811–92) and Josiah Royce (1855–1916) fall under this heading, as does Henry Mansel (1820–71), who continued to defend traditional natural theology long after it had been (as we now may think) refuted by Hume and Kant and reinterpreted by the latter’s pantheistic followers. It is only against this backdrop that the theological shock of Darwinism can be appreciated. Defenses of traditional religion are discussed by James C. Livingston in Chapter 18.

## SOCIETY

The shadow cast by the French Revolution is the starting point for all nineteenth-century political thought. The 1790s saw controversies between defenders of the Revolution, such as Fichte and Richard Price (1723–91), and its attackers, such as Burke and Rehberg. The Revolution was demonized by a

whole generation of Romantic reactionaries, but also by some liberals, such as Fries. Nineteenth-century radical thought can be understood as an attempt to diagnose where and why the Revolution had failed and to determine what it left to be done. The influence of the Revolution on nineteenth-century philosophy is explored in Chapter 19 by Frederick C. Beiser and Pamela Edwards.

The natural law tradition, deriving from scholasticism, had remained robust in the early modern period. But in the German idealist tradition it had been rethought and retained only in a modified form. At the same time, the whole notion of natural right was being fundamentally attacked from standpoints as varied as those of Burke, Bentham, and Marx. The impact of this repudiation on nineteenth-century ethics and political philosophy was far reaching. Now that the idea of natural right (today more commonly called “human rights”) is again in favor, it is important to understand why the nineteenth century so strongly rejected it. Jeremy Waldron helps us to understand the decline of natural right in Chapter 20.

Before the eighteenth century, the study of society was primarily a study of the political state. But beginning with Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Herder, it was recognized that the state is founded on a human society or community in a deeper sense, which could be conceived either as a cultural tradition, following Herder, or as a system of practical interaction, following Adam Smith (1723–90), and leading to Hegel’s conception of civil society and Marx’s conception of a mode of material production. The social thought of Destutt de Tracy and Comte’s invention of the science of sociology represent still further conceptions of society in a sense distinct from the political state. Nineteenth-century conceptions of society are explored by Frederick Neuhouser in Chapter 21.

A new science of society, political economy was originated in the eighteenth century but underwent some striking developments in the nineteenth century, whose course may be indicated by such names as David Ricardo (1772–1823), Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), James Mill, Jean-Baptiste Say (1767–1832), John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, William Stanley Jevons (1835–82), and Marie-Ésprit Léon Walras (1834–1910). The relevance of this history to philosophy is evident if we consider how important it is to the subsequent history of both utilitarianism and Marxism. The origins and variety of nineteenth-century economic theories are explored by Debra Satz in Chapter 22.

One tradition in nineteenth-century thought saw the importance of the concept of society as lying in the fact that the explicit, conscious, political form of society is grounded in a more natural or traditional form of community, which is not and cannot be the result of conscious rational deliberation. This view, common to the counter-Enlightenment, the Romantics, and Hegel, was decisive for the development of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries. Alongside it, of course, was the development of the still dominant conception of the modern state based on liberal individualism. Erica Benner treats the theme of the nation-state in Chapter 23.

“Individualism” is another Enlightenment idea that truly flourished only in the nineteenth century, when the rise of capitalism and the increasing democratization of culture and politics led to protests against “mass society.” This theme took diverse forms in the thought of Schiller, Humboldt, Stirner, Marx, Mill, Emerson, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). In Chapter 24, ideals of individuality and self-culture are explored by Daniel Brudney.

Nineteenth-century thinkers knew they were living in a period of rapid social change, and they generally believed it to be progressive change, toward a higher or better future. Some saw progressive change in liberal terms, proceeding from freedom of thought, freedom of trade, scientific progress, social enlightenment, and political democratization. But the confidence in progress is not only consistent with social dissatisfaction, but often even an ingredient in it. The fundamental notion here is probably freedom, which was in various ways a fundamental concern to Fichte, Hegel, Mill, and Marx. Other important themes in nineteenth-century social dissatisfaction are political inequality and the demand for political participation as a condition of freedom, poverty and economic inequality (Fichte, Hegel, Marx, Mill), and alienation (Hegel, Kierkegaard, the Young Hegelians, Marx). Nineteenth-century radicalism is surveyed in Chapter 25 by Christine Blaettler.

Radical thinkers such as Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–65), François Marie Charles Fourier (1772–1837), Michael Bakunin (1814–76), and Karl Marx saw a progressive social future as being fundamentally different from the present, requiring a fundamental reshaping of social, economic, and political relationships, even a basic transformation of human nature. The philosophical roots of such views lay in the radical Enlightenment and German idealism. Belonging to this radicalism, too, are the philosophical origins of modern feminist thought in well-known writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) and John Stuart Mill, but also in lesser-known ones such as Anna Doyle Wheeler (1785–1848) and French critics of Proudhon’s views on marriage, such as Jenny Painsard d’Hericourt (1809–75) and Juliette Adam (1836–1936), as well as the radical feminists Olympe des Gouges (1748–93) and Claire Démar (c. 1800–33).

## HISTORY

The nineteenth century liked to think of itself as historically self-aware, and especially to contrast itself favorably in this respect with the century that

preceded it. As Ernst Cassirer argued in his book *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*, this was largely self-deception, since it was not only lonely figures such as Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) or critics of the Enlightenment such as Herder who were highly creative philosophers of history; even such mainstream Enlightenment thinkers as Voltaire, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81), Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), Herder, and Kant laid the foundations for the historical theories of the nineteenth century. Michel Foucault has claimed that the Enlightenment was the first historically self-conscious age, on the ground that it is the first historical period whose name for itself coincides with our name for it.

The early nineteenth century may not have been the first historically self-conscious age, but it was the period in which the subject of philosophy came to include its own history and to count its comprehension of that history as one of its essential tasks. It was also the age in which a historical approach to all human endeavors began to take hold, and the nineteenth century developed very creatively what the Enlightenment had begun. This makes it fitting to end the present volume with a survey of nineteenth-century thinking about history. During the nineteenth century, historians and philosophers such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), and Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–84) reflected on the nature of history as a subject of study and on how historiography should be conceived and practiced. These reflections were related to, but distinct from, the study of the human sciences (or *Geisteswissenschaften*) and should be considered separately both from it and from the speculative or scientific theories of history that also characterized nineteenth-century thought. This methodological aspect of nineteenth-century philosophy of history is treated by Laurence Dickey in Chapter 26.

The nineteenth century was, however, also a period in which philosophers attempted speculative theories of history, in which they tried to account for the changes in human affairs through time in a comprehensive way, either through philosophical categories or through fundamental features of human social life – whether religious, political, economic, or psychological – that might provide a key to understanding the successive ages of human history and the transitions from one age to the next. Among important nineteenth-century thinkers on history are Marquis Condorcet (1743–94), Fichte, Hegel, Comte, Carlo Cattaneo (1801–69), Marx, and Nietzsche. The eighteenth-century roots of speculative theories of history, and their nineteenth-century developments, are discussed in Chapter 27 by John Zammito.

This volume's treatment of philosophy from 1790 to 1870 is completed by a discussion of the historiography of philosophy itself by Michael N. Forster in Chapter 28. Some examples of German thinkers who developed

this historiography are Dietrich Tiedemann (1791–7), Gottlieb Tennemann (1789–1819), G. W. F. Hegel (1835), Kuno Fischer (1854–77), and Friedrich Überweg (1872). There were also nineteenth-century histories of parts of philosophy, such as the essays on the history of ethics by Friedrich Carl Stäudlin (1761–1826) and *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (1852) by William Whewell. Nineteenth-century history of philosophy is the principal source both of our unquestioned assumptions about the history of philosophy and of many of the theses about the history of philosophy that twentieth-century revisionists have called into question. The present volume attempts to provide a many-sided picture of nineteenth-century philosophy as it appears to us at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is only fitting that we conclude with an essay on how the nineteenth century understood the history of philosophy itself.





# I

## PHILOSOPHY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY



# I

## THE KANTIAN AFTERMATH: REACTION AND REVOLUTION IN GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

ROBERT B. PIPPIN

### KANTIANISM

In 1781 Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, delivered the bad news that the human mind can (even worse, must) pose important, unavoidable philosophical questions that it cannot possibly answer. These were distinct, perennial philosophical questions, answerable, if at all, by pure reason alone, independent of any appeal to experience. (Kant thought the most important ones concerned freedom, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul, but the scope of his critique also extended to issues like the nature of the mind, the human good, the purpose of nature, or any attempt to know “things in themselves.”) While, according to Kant, we could at least settle once and for all just what those limits to knowledge were and why we were not able to cross such a boundary, that seemed small consolation. Metaphysics, the “queen of the sciences,” had understood itself as capable of knowing how things must be or could not be and so had prided itself on the certainty of its claims and on a rigor in its method rivaled only by mathematics. So it was not for nothing that Kant became known as the *allzerstörende*, the “all-destroying.” The skeptical sentiment expressed in Kant’s critical work was not of course isolated in Königsberg. The latter half of the eighteenth century can be viewed as a collective debate about the nature and even future of rationalist philosophy, or philosophy as it had come to be understood since Plato (especially as the impact and advances of Newtonian physics were more and more felt), and about the right way to state the principles underlying an ever more popular empiricism.<sup>1</sup>

This latter had become a problem since to many such empiricism seemed dangerously close to a radical or all-consuming skepticism, confining our experiential knowledge to subjective states, rendering dubious even the existence

<sup>1</sup> The popularity of empiricism, both in itself and as a challenge to philosophy, was growing in France as well as Great Britain and Germany. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), 3–36.

of the external world and other minds, not to mention the truths of religion and morality. If modern philosophy in some way culminated in Humean skepticism and Berkleyean idealism (as Thomas Reid, for one, thought),<sup>2</sup> then not only was metaphysics in trouble, but, many began to fear, so were any claims to our allegiance made by any normative principle. The demand for a radical enlightenment threatened to culminate in a paralyzing stasis. (This situation was all the more urgent since philosophy had assumed an ever more public face in Europe. Fewer works were published in Latin, and the political role of philosophy “officials” came to be a lively, complicated topic.) Just as the Scottish Common Sense philosophy of Reid, Oswald, and Beattie can be seen as a response to such skepticism and idealism, there were many in Germany who also began to seek a balanced position, making room for the legitimacy of general principles that might not be justifiable empirically, but could nonetheless be shown to have some sort of “indubitable” or otherwise necessary status. To some extent, although Kant rejected (with stinging contempt in his *Prolegomena*)<sup>3</sup> the Scottish “descriptive” account of such unjustifiable but undeniable beliefs, his enterprise can also be seen as the most famous and successful attempt of this moderating, synthesizing response to what has been called the “cognitive crisis of the Enlightenment.”<sup>4</sup>

Kant did not proceed, however, simply by trying very hard to answer such metaphysical questions and, in failing often and significantly enough (or in pointing to the seemingly endless failures of others), concluding that it was reasonable simply to give up. (A conclusion like this would not be unusual. Often a very good reason to withhold assent to a thesis is that no convincing argument or evidence has yet been provided to support it, and so a skepticism about philosophy need not involve a general proof that theoretical knowledge a priori is impossible. One could just note that for all the argument and evidence advanced, no determinate conclusion could be drawn.) But Kant thought that he had devised a way of asking first about the very “possibility” of any philosophical or a priori knowledge, or even of any experiential knowledge, a way

<sup>2</sup> Actually, Reid believed this about the entire history of philosophy, beginning with Plato.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 6–8; *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [hereafter Kant, Ak], 4:258–9. There is an indispensable book on the level of knowledge about, and degree of engagement with, the Scots among German philosophers in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Manfred Kuehn’s *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800: A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987). Also extremely helpful: Lewis White Beck’s *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, 36ff.

of determining the conditions necessary to be able to say at all how things are, whether a posteriori or a priori. (By understanding this, we could thereby know why answers to some questions would be impossible.) He invented, in other words, something he called “transcendental” philosophy and that positive project became in many ways just as influential as his critical results. (He thereby claimed to give “metaphysics” a “secure” foundation for the first time,<sup>5</sup> although he was well aware that this involved a new version of a priori knowledge, not a solution to the traditional problems.<sup>6</sup> He gave a relatively clear account of this new methodology and quickly sketched and asserted its central presuppositions, some of them tossed off without acknowledgment of their profoundly controversial nature, in the opening passages of the first *Critique*. In the second edition “Preface,” he notes:

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them a priori through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an a priori cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us.<sup>7</sup>

And in the “Introduction,” he baptizes this procedure:

I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects in so far as this is to be possible a priori.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bxviii. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in Kant, Ak, vols. 3 and 4 (all citations to Kant’s first *Critique* will be to this translation). Cf. also Axiix, “I make bold to say that there cannot be a single metaphysical problem that has not been solved here, or at least to the solution of which the key has not been provided.”

<sup>6</sup> This would amount to what Paton called a “metaphysics of experience” and in Kant’s own terms would prepare the way for what he called a “metaphysics of morals” and a “metaphysics of nature.” The possibility that Kant may have been committed to more modest metaphysical claims than in dogmatic rationalism, but still identifiably traditionally metaphysical, has been advanced for several years by Karl Ameriks. (His claim is that Kant’s target is much more specific rationalist arguments – how they tried to get there, rather than the destination.) See his *Kant’s Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and his views on this and what he also considered a moderate, limited version of transcendental philosophy in Part I of his *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a good summary of his position, see his exchange with Daniel Breazeale and Charles Larmore in *Inquiry*: Daniel Breazeale, “Two Cheers for Post-Kantianism: A Response to Karl Ameriks”; Charles Larmore, “Back to Kant? No Way”; and Karl Ameriks, “On Being Neither Post- nor Anti-Kantian: A Reply to Breazeale and Larmore Concerning *The Fate of Autonomy*,” all in *Inquiry* 46, no. 2 (2003): 239–92.

<sup>7</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxvi.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A11/B25.

A good deal of both the post-Kantian enthusiasm and the dissatisfaction with Kant's critical project are on view in these unusual formulations. The prospect of establishing something about objects "before they are given to us" is strikingly odd and must have so struck Kant's original readers, accustomed as they were to claims for some special way objects could be said to be given to, graspable by, "the mind's eye," or the light of reason. Kant was clearly counting on the resonances such a claim would have had with readers now already used to advances in modern mathematics and the mathematical sciences. This is clear when he cites the examples of Galileo, Torricelli, and Stahl and notes,

They comprehended that reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design.<sup>9</sup>

But there is still an air of paradox that arises when that model of anticipatory knowledge of the natural world is imported to philosophy, and Kant is not shy about reminding us of the radical assumptions behind this proposal.

*Nothing here can escape us, because what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself as soon as reason's common principle has been discovered. The perfect unity of this kind of cognition ... make this unconditioned completeness not only possible but necessary. Tecum habita, et noris quam sit tibi curta supellex* (Dwell in your own house, and you will know how simple your possessions are.). – Persius<sup>10</sup>

As we shall see, it is this project – reason's examination of its own possibility and the attendant controversies over the nature of the object of such a study and the right implications to draw from it – that set the agenda for an extraordinary flurry of philosophical activity in a brief fifty-year period, much of which also set the agenda for a good deal of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy.<sup>11</sup> Whereas some thought of philosophy itself as uncontrollably

<sup>9</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxiii.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axx, my emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Kant wavers a bit in sketching the relation between transcendental philosophy proper and "critique." He appears to separate the two, to consider the latter a mere preparation for the former, not part of it, perhaps a "canon." The former would involve a complete, systematic enumeration of all a priori knowledge, including all analytic knowledge necessary to "provide insight into the principles of a priori synthesis." And such substantive transcendental philosophy would presumably still in some sense take as its object our *Erkenntnisart*, not objects. But critique is said to involve no "doctrine" and aims only to supply something like the criterion ("the touchstone") for the actual system of transcendental philosophy, or, alternatively, should be understood as an "architectonic" outline of all transcendental philosophy. Yet, on the other hand, "To the critique of pure reason there accordingly belongs everything that constitutes transcendental philosophy" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A13/B26–A15/B28, my emphasis). This ambiguity about whether critique is part of transcendental philosophy, indeed all of it, or whether a mere preparation is a preview of the famous interpretive problems surrounding the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (whether the PhS is the first part of the "system" or its "introduction"). And it is not of course an issue unique to Hegel. Cf.

corrosive, morally and religiously subversive (such as Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder, and especially Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who thought of himself as a kind of Humean),<sup>12</sup> others that the metaphysics in the Leibnizean-Wolffean tradition could meet the empirical-skeptical attacks and survive (Moses Mendelssohn and Johann August Eberhard), and others were more or less adherents of the Scottish Common Sense philosophy (the Göttingen school), Kant was unique in that he invented in effect a new task for philosophy and so a new way to justify claims about the world (synthetic judgments) that were not grounded in experience, were a priori.

Kant's impact was the most important by far, and by 1830 German philosophy had experienced a number of great Kantian aftershocks. Remarkably, almost everyone of importance in the debates, apart from the parties of metaphysics, faith, and common sense, seemed to profess to be philosophizing "in the Kantian spirit," but their variations of Kantian themes were so radical that they amounted to some jujitsu attempt to use Kant against himself.<sup>13</sup> They seemed out to prove that far from humbling philosophical pretensions, Kant had prepared the way for the ultimate completion of philosophy, or the transformation of the love of wisdom into wisdom, mere philosophy into "science," indeed a knowledge of "the Absolute." Within this latter group (which we might call, subject to explanation later, the anti-Kantian Kantians) there was, among the many claims, one conclusion that was to prove the guiding inspiration for an upheaval in philosophy's self-understanding at least as great as Kant's revolution, although now mostly in what became known as the "Continental" philosophical tradition. The famous catchphrase was Hegel's in the "Preface" to his *Philosophy of Right*: "Philosophy is its own time comprehended in thoughts." Hegel claimed to show that every philosopher is essentially a "child of his time,"<sup>14</sup> even while he insisted that genuinely "comprehending" a time "in

F. Schlegel's remarks, in his Jena lectures on *Transzendentalphilosophie* (1800–1), about the error of attempting to establish the power (*Kraft*) of reason "before" using it. Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen (1800–07)*, Erster Teil, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. 12, ed. Jean-Jacques Anstett (Munich: Schöningh, 1962) [henceforth Schlegel, KA], 12:96.

<sup>12</sup> See the account of Jacobi in Frederick Beiser's *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), and for a discussion of the relation between all such schools and the Scottish Common Sense philosophers, see Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, chaps. 4 and 6.

<sup>13</sup> For Kant's famous defense of the letter of his work, at the same time as he professes his doctrine to consist wholly of the standpoint of "common sense," see his 1799 letter to Fichte, in Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759–1799*, ed. and trans. Arnold Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 254.

<sup>14</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21; *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, in *Werke: Theorieausgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970–) [henceforth Hegel, *Werke*], 7:26.



thought” was also in some way to transcend it, to understand and incorporate that time within a developmental process that was in itself, as a whole, rational. Reason can still be said to “have insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design,” but reflective attention to what it so “produces,” what reason requires of nature and spirit, reveals (a) an essentially temporal or developmental structure to such requirements and (b) that such “productions” were not to be thought of as “imposed” on some exogenous material of experience, and so were not subject to Kant’s critical restrictions about the unknowability of things in themselves.

These were the twin transformations in philosophical methodology or self-understanding that did so much to influence so much later philosophy. Kant’s revolution amounted to his insistence that the proper object of reason’s attention was not the noetic or substantial structure of reality, but itself. (“[O]ur object is *not the nature of things*, which is inexhaustible, but *the understanding*, which judges about the nature of things.”)<sup>15</sup> This prospect of philosophy as a formal enterprise, not a direct attempt to know something about the world, but an account of the way we talk about, think about the world, about the normative constraints that govern such claim making, would resonate through later nineteenth-century neo-Kantianism and set the stage for logical positivism and the “linguistic turn.”<sup>16</sup> Hegel’s claim to link philosophy to its time, to consider it in some sense an expression of an age in the way an artistic movement might be understood, would reverberate through the German historical school, romantic hermeneutics, and would come to influence the likes of Marx, Weber, Dilthey, the Frankfurt school, and finally, in a kind of apotheosis of historicism, Heidegger.

There is a narrative link connecting these epochal moments (a link between Kant’s invention of transcendental philosophy and Hegel’s historical and diagnostic conception of philosophy), one that is of some philosophical not merely historical interest. But to understand this link, we need some sense of that great explosion of system building, theology, and aesthetics set off by Kant’s spark.

## DISSATISFACTIONS

A great many of Kant’s successors were sympathetic to Jacobi’s famous complaint that one could not enter the Kantian system without his doctrine of things in themselves and their unknowability, but one could not remain in the

<sup>15</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A12–13, my emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> See my *Kant’s Theory of Form: An Essay on the Critique of Pure Reason* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982) for an assessment of Kant’s attempt at such a formal analysis.

system and still accept such claims.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, Kant appeared bothered by no criticism as much as the reaction that greeted the first edition – that his was a version of Berkeleyan idealism that reduced the empirical world to mind-dependent states of consciousness, mere representations (the claim that *this* is what objects “conforming” to subjective conditions amounted to). He insisted that he had distinguished clearly between the objects of inner and outer sense, had relegated such mental states to inner sense, and had defended a robust “empirical realism,” the claim that we certainly did have knowledge of external objects “outside us” in space, even if only as subject to our epistemic conditions. Yet, on the other hand, he equivocated on what “outside us” amounted to, did seem to speak the language of phenomenalism in discussing such external objects, and, despite the addition of a Refutation of Idealism in the second edition, persisted in claiming that we were forever “cut off” from the true “ground” of appearances, prohibited from knowing things in themselves, and confined instead to our representations.<sup>18</sup> To some (such as Jacobi), he even seemed to apply with gross inconsistency the category he had legitimated only for appearances, causality, to such noumena, ascribing to them the status of the causal origin of the determinacy of appearances.<sup>19</sup> In this context, Kant’s claim to have defended synthetic a priori knowledge seemed purchased at a very high price; he had left us unsure whether we could count this knowledge of objects–qua–subject–to–our–requirements as real knowledge or as only some sort of second-rate knowledge.

This noumenal skepticism seemed unacceptable, and many set off in search of a way of avoiding such results while still keeping faith with Kant’s original transcendental revolution, his break with what many continued to call the “dogmatism” of standard metaphysical realism and its uncritical assumption that what was unthinkable was impossible, what was rationally required was metaphysically necessary.<sup>20</sup> For others, the problem with Kant was not that he had been too skeptical about such knowledge, but that he had not been skeptical enough, that he ought to have been skeptical about his own claims to be able to determine the necessary conditions of experience. There was no good reason to believe, as some, such as Schulze (or “Aenesidemus”), argued,<sup>21</sup> that

<sup>17</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus, Über den transzendentalen Idealismus*, in *Werke*, eds. Friedrich Roth and Friedrich Köppen (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), 2:291–310.

<sup>18</sup> Especially in the Elucidation and General Remarks to the Transcendental Aesthetic, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A36/B53–A49/B73, and the Fourth Paralogism, A367–80.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Prolegomena*, 62; Kant, Ak 4:314. See also in the first *Critique*, Bxxviff. and A251ff.

<sup>20</sup> By “dogmatism,” people meant “without a critique of reason,” without an attempt to establish that the kind of knowledge attempted was possible, and, if so, how it was possible.

<sup>21</sup> G. E. Schulze, *Aenesidemus, oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementarphilosophie*, Aetas Kantiana series (Brussels: Culture & Civilization, 1969).

reason was at all capable of determining the conditions without which any knowledge would be impossible, and better reason to believe that Kant had merely cataloged the psychological workings of the mind in a way itself open to much doubt and certainly in no necessary connection with what objects, even objects of experience, must be or could not fail to be.

So Kant's project was accused of being "subjectivistic" (his transcendental conditions were ascribed wholly to the subjective side of experience, what we brought to it independent of the content of experience) and therewith of being hopelessly inadequate. Some, such as Salomon Maimon, realized that the heart of the matter on this issue was the strict (and so, many claimed, untenable) separation between the active understanding and the passive faculty of sensibility. It was this strict distinction between the form and content of experience that both made possible philosophy's capacity to issue necessary and universal claims about all possible experience (with such claims based on an analysis of such universally necessary subjective forms, pure concepts and intuitions, analyzable in isolation) and yet that also ensured that the resulting en-formed content would be so "subjectively" conditioned that it could not serve well in any argument about the possibility of genuine empirical knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Kant had wanted to establish the necessary conditions of experience, thereby ensuring that there could be no conceivable contrast between such conditioned results and "what the object might really be." He had even issued such speculative "identifications" as "the object *is* that in the concept of which the manifold is united"<sup>23</sup> (i.e., that is all that "being an object" could amount to), and that "the conditions of the possibility of experience are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience."<sup>24</sup> But he always had to add in some way "necessary for us," and so "only phenomenal objects," and so forth.

Of course, from the Kantian point of view, the implication of such dissatisfactions would have to be either a retreat to the alternatives he was proud of having undermined and left behind – the attempts to "sensitize" the concepts of the understanding, as in Lockean empiricism,<sup>25</sup> or to "intellectualize"

<sup>22</sup> Maimon even argued that on the Kantian assumptions the very cooperation between such separate faculties was incoherent, and that what Kant had established in the Second Analogy was so formal (given any event, there must be some cause) as to render it useless in any answer to Hume. Salomon Maimon, *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, in *Werke*, ed. V. Verra, vol. 2 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1965). See also Paul Franks's helpful discussion, "All or Nothing: Systematicity and Nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95–116.

<sup>23</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B137, my emphasis. Cf. also, "the unity that the object makes necessary can be nothing other than the formal unity of the consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of the representations" (A105).

<sup>24</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A158/B197.

<sup>25</sup> That is, to understand concepts as faint copies of, reflected remainders derived from vivid, content-rich sensations.

appearances, as in Leibnizean rationalism<sup>26</sup> – or a speculative excess he himself seemed to toy with in his *Opus Postumum* – a “deduction” in some way of content, of the matter of experience.<sup>27</sup> However it was repackaged, such an attempted a priori determination of the content of experience would have to be regressive, as in, say, Schelling’s attempted philosophical determination of what nature itself must be. By Kant’s lights, by contrast, the separability of intellect from sensibility was merely another way of pointing out the obvious – that we were finite, discursive knowers. Our minds could on their own supply us with no content, must be provided with such data, could know only by judging, actively classifying and synthesizing content provided to it: in a word that we were possessed of no “intellectual intuition.” The *only* window on reality for human knowers was sensory. And if we could not meet the ultimate gold standard of absolute knowledge – God’s creating the object he thinks as he thinks it – what we had left was certainly not thereby second-rate. And consistently enough, this – intellectual intuition – is just what Fichte, Schelling, and in some ways Novalis, and in some different way Hegel insisted we *did* indeed have. One strain in such an emerging school of thought (tied especially to Fichte) had it that Kant himself had to be availing himself of some such potency, given that his own determination of the forms of experience amounted to an a priori determination of content (we just needed to extend consistently what Kant had started in this determination of content), and even that the apperceptive character of experience, the way we must be said to be in some self-relation in all relation to objects, was already a manifestation of such an unusual faculty. (By Kant’s own theory, such apperceptive activity was neither a judgment nor a manifestation of inner sense, so it seemed already close to a form of “intellectual intuition.”)<sup>28</sup>

As in both issues, the phenomena-noumena split and the understanding-sensibility split, the great problem, reappearing everywhere in Kant’s project, were the dualisms so prominent and frequent that they were taken as indication of some fatal absence or incompleteness in Kant’s formulations. And very often that weakness was understood to be due to a lack of clarity about transcendental or critical philosophy itself.<sup>29</sup> Such dualisms were manifest in

<sup>26</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A271/B327. That is, to portray the senses as only dimly and unclearly grasping what the intellect could clarify and grasp more clearly.

<sup>27</sup> The best discussion of these late developments in Kant’s thinking: Eckart Förster, *Kant’s Final Synthesis: An Essay on the Opus Postumum* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. chap. 3 of my *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> In his so-called *Differenzschrift*, or his early work *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. H. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1977), Hegel was already pointing to the way that philosophical claims should be understood within a larger social and historical context. He treated the presence of these dualisms in Kantian philosophy as

the split between practical reason and sensual desire, between understanding (“what we can know”) and reason (“what we can think”), between subject and the object in general, between theoretical and practical philosophy, and, by far the most important and crucially unresolved dualism, between freedom and necessity, the gap between the conditions of morally responsible agency and the conditions of the possibility of experience, between the Rousseauian and the Newtonian origins of the idealist legacy.<sup>30</sup> This was taken to be problematic not only because Kant’s dualism seemed so strict or heterogeneous that it made difficult understanding any relation between such poles, but because it seemed that Kant merely began by assuming such dualisms, did not ground them, confessed to being unable to deduce them from a common source, and this left many with the impression of a residual empiricism, even dogmatism, in Kant’s own enterprise. (Indeed, the first, loudest, and clearest voice demanding a more rigorous and systematic beginning and end to the critical system was that of Karl Reinhold, the Kantian epigone and popularizer, who did more than anyone to spread the Kantian word.)<sup>31</sup> And again, much more importantly, it just seemed completely unacceptable to claim that the most important condition of the unique dignity of and respect for human being, freedom, should be ruled theoretically unknowable, merely a practically necessary postulate.

Accordingly, anyone sympathetic to such criticisms would also be imposing on himself requirements far stricter than Kant thought could be met. These would especially involve complete systematicity (the required response to the previous charge of ungrounded presuppositions). Kant had certainly recognized the inevitable attempt by human reason to “ascend” from “conditioned” knowledge to the “unconditioned” but had insisted we could take on such attempts only as a regulative ideal, could never claim to complete any such series or to work out fully and for all time the determinate relations between the parts and such a whole. Kant freely admitted that the delimited situation of human reason, as his analysis had left it, was an affront to reason and unacceptable, so much so that he even conceded, remarkably, that dialectical illusion, or attempted reasoning about the unconditioned, was a perennial feature

an expression of the very general “dividedness,” even the “torn apartness” (*Zerissenheit*), of the modern form of life itself, suggesting that these *aporiai* were not philosophical mistakes in Kant, but a manifestation of a deeper incoherence, necessary commitments to incompatible options in such a form of life or “shape of spirit.” Cf. 83, 85. *Differenz des Fichte’schen und Schelling’schen Systems der Philosophie*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Herausgegeben im Auftrag der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–) [henceforth Hegel, GW], 4:8, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the summary by Karl Ameriks, “Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism,” in *Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, 1–17.

<sup>31</sup> For a very good summary of Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie*, see Fredrick Beiser’s discussion in *Fate of Reason*, chap. 8, 226–65, and see also part 2 of Karl Ameriks’s *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*.

of human thought, even after the exposure of such illusion by critique.<sup>32</sup> And indeed, even those who attempted with the greatest ambition to fulfill such a systematic requirement, Fichte and Schelling, recognized themselves that their attempts at a *Wissenschaftslehre* (the attempt to transform mere “Kritik” into a “Lehre” or positive doctrine of science) and a “*System of Transcendental Idealism*”<sup>33</sup> were failures, and they both moved later to positions that bore little connection to their Kantian beginnings.

Other attempts to make good on what their criticisms of Kant required did not fare much better. Claims that the problem of knowledge could only be solved by defending a “subject-object identity” sounded like bizarre claims that in some way ontologically identified human judgments with objects in the world. (Or worse, that such judging activity and the natural world were both aspectual or modal manifestations of an underlying substance and so originally, substantively, identical.) And claims that we should not be said to be making judgments about the Absolute, but that the Absolute (the unconditioned, infinite totality) was expressing *its* self-knowledge “through us” made it very hard to understand how *we* could be said to know this was so, given that *that* claim too would just be the expression of the Absolute’s self-knowledge. Or: Schelling’s question might be an interesting one – is the subject-object difference a subjective difference or an objective difference? – and it might be reasonable for him to wonder about an original source or substance itself neither subject nor object (but “indifferent” between them), but how or why such a substance would or must differentiate itself so into such subjects and objects, not to mention into cabbages and kings, into thinkings and doings, remained quite dark. And it might be true that, as a historical matter, the rediscovery of Spinoza that resulted from Jacobi’s attack on Lessing’s Spinozism was an indispensable additional motive in such speculative adventures (as was the excited importation of so many Platonic themes).<sup>34</sup> Given the disappointments with what were perceived to be the limitations of Kant’s subjectivism, or his inevitable skepticism, or his various dualisms, it would indeed be understandable that the most sophisticated and scientifically informed modern form of monism,

<sup>32</sup> This intriguing problem – why must illusion persist even after it has been exposed? – has not received an extensive discussion in the literature. There is a very helpful new book about that and related topics by Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Lauchlan Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978).

<sup>34</sup> On the Spinoza controversy, see Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, 44–108; Dieter Henrich’s chapter, “Der Weg des spekulativen Idealismus,” in *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 101–34; and Manfred Baum, “The Beginning’s of Schelling’s Philosophy of Nature,” in *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 199–215.

in which substance could be understood as neither mind nor matter, would be quite attractive. (It also did not hurt that the philosopher proposing the thesis had inaugurated biblical criticism and was a fierce antidogmatist and a persecuted Enlightenment hero.)

But, because so many were in fact motivated by such a desire to “animate” this Spinozistic substance (to see it as alive, a purposefully self-moving life force), to make use of it to articulate the *hen kai pan* totality they deemed necessary, or even, like Schlegel, Novalis, and Schelling, to attempt to “synthesize Fichte and Spinoza,” all of that is nowhere near even the beginning of a philosophically adequate account of what this could mean, and no one has ever provided one – not to mention that it is just not very likely that being should be understood as an infinite, self-differentiating, living totality; it is mind-boggling to imagine what a “synthesis of monism, vitalism, and rationalism”<sup>35</sup> could mean; and it seems quite a stretch, when pressed about the epistemic possibility of such claims, to wave over them the magic wand of “transcendental argument” and plead that such monism claims should be counted as necessary conditions for the possibility of determinate experience.<sup>36</sup>

To be sure, the difficulty of demonstrating any of this philosophically was itself a major theme in these discussions, especially in the work of Hölderlin, Schelling, Novalis, and Schlegel. The problem for these artists/philosophers/critics was precisely the discursive nature of judgment insisted on by Kant. Judgment was an *Ur-teilen*, an original separating of what was not in fact separate (Socrates’ being a man, say, or his being white, from his being Socrates), just in order to manifest such unity to finite intellects. But judgment itself thus intimated an original unity, prior to any judgmental articulation, not capturable in limited discursive judgment but nonetheless “present” in some way. Such an original unity, lost in all our conscious judgments and doings, could, however, be made present in some indirect way by art, especially by

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 352.

<sup>36</sup> This is what Beiser claims on p. 589 of his *German Idealism*. In general, this is quite a helpful book, but Beiser is often given to pronouncing on the “philosophical importance” or “sophistication” of these “vitalist Spinozists” in ways that are not justified by any philosophical demonstration. This late attempt to enlist “transcendental argument” is the strangest, since that strategy is precisely what began all the worries about subjectivism in the first place (that “we can’t understand the possibility of X without Y” need have little to do with the truth about Y, as Aenesidemus, among many others, was eager to point out). At any rate, nothing Beiser says gives one reason to think we are in for a new wave of “vitalist, rationalist, Plato-inspired, drunk-with-God” monism anytime soon. For a contrasting narrative of nineteenth-century German philosophy, one that makes much more of the normativity/naturalism and antiempiricist elements in the Kantian aftermath, see Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760 to 1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

lyric poetry. And the problem with this program is one familiar to all such accounts. It is very hard to tell the good intimations from the bad ones, especially since we are not talking about aesthetic qualities alone but a philosophical profundity so profound as to be indemonstrable and, of course, therewith incomparable with any other.<sup>37</sup>

### THE HEGELIAN SPIRIT

The preceding account is a bit skewed, of course. Not everything in the Kantian aftermath is best seen as a reaction to Kant's noumenal skepticism, dualism, and incomplete systematicity.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the general problematic at issue in Kant's philosophy and in much German philosophy of the period, described here as a triple problematic – to concede that not all human knowledge could be empirical, while admitting the critical objections to rationalist metaphysics, and avoiding the appeal to merely practically indubitable elements of common sense – occasioned complex and fruitful controversies outside Germany. William Whewell's claims about the cooperative roles of, yet differences between, both what he called "Fundamental Ideas" and sensations, and aspects of his moral intuitionism sound Kantian themes and would be relevant as well (although Whewell's concession that there could be moral progress and his claim that there could be empirical discoveries of necessary truths also highlight similarities with Hegel). But the post-Kantian framework gives us one way of understanding an underlying Kantian aporia that will play its way through Fichte and Hegel and will return us to the alpha and omega suggested at the beginning and so to the lasting influence of this period of philosophy. That concerns the invention of transcendental philosophy itself, or what Hegel called the problem of "reflection," of reason's absolute reflection on itself, eventually the self-authorization of reason's claim to authority.

<sup>37</sup> For philosophically ambitious treatments of the early romantics, see Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), and Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) and his *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> For some indication of the magnitude of the problems involved in understanding properly the post-Kantian aftermath, see the extensive work done on the subject by Dieter Henrich and his partners in the "Konstellationsforschung" project. Henrich has claimed in this project that we need to be able to separate from the self-understanding of individual thinkers the "inner dynamic" of the positions at issue, always available to such thinkers but often not properly understood and accessible "through" those self-interpretations. Only a proper setting of the actual "constellation" of issues in a nuanced historical context can form the basis of such a narrative. For examples, see his *Konstellationen; Selbstverhältnisse* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982); and *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*, ed. Eckart Förster (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).



That is, a good candidate for the deepest, most intractable and potentially paradoxical of the problems in Kant's legacy would be the status of transcendental philosophy. If the possibility of the synthetic a priori judgments at the heart of modern science (and for Kant, in mathematics as well) needed to be established, required a prior critique, what should be said about the possibility of transcendental reflection itself? By what right do we assume that we have some access to the necessary conditions for the possibility of experience, and if so, how? Unless we can somehow establish what we are up to in such an enterprise, the status of the results will remain as controversial and divided as they have always been. The enterprise will tend to look like a form of psychology or even psychologism (how the mind works, how we have to think about the world, regardless of how it really is) or, on the other extreme, an attempted account of the "logically" indispensable components of the very *concept of experience* (the conditions necessary for "any possible representation of an object" to make sense). The former has little to do with Kant's intentions since he clearly and insistently distinguished between *quid facti* and *quid iuris* questions,<sup>39</sup> and the latter (often associated with Strawson's austerity in *The Bounds of Sense*)<sup>40</sup> will have to depend on some claim about meaning that will again leave unclear the relations among "how we have to think about experience," "the sense we could make of it," and "the nature of the objects of experience," on the other.<sup>41</sup>

The issue – what exactly is Kant referring to in referring to "the subject" of experience – is also at stake in the controversies and the vagaries that attend any discussion of what the idealism in "German Idealism" consists in. Since Kant seemed to be talking about elements in any experience that could not be said to be derived from experience, he fell naturally into the habit of designating *these* elements (pure concepts and the forms of intuition) "contributions by the subject." "Ideal," "formal," "underived from experience," "subjective," and "knowable a priori" would all be synonyms in this account. Since, as we have seen, much later dissatisfaction originated in (a) this equation of "subjective" with "formal" (the claim that thinking was judging, discursive, could supply itself with no content) and (b) his conclusion that therefore any object of experience could only be phenomenal, knowable only subject to our formal, intuitive, conceptual, and especially finite conditions (only as so en-formed), one might assume that Kant's later critics would want to eliminate this restriction.

<sup>39</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A84/B116.

<sup>40</sup> P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Richard Rorty, "Strawson's Objectivity Argument," *Review of Metaphysics* 24 (1970): 207–44; his "Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments," *Nous* 5 (1971): 3–14; and Barry Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," in *The First Critique*, ed. T. Penelhum and J. MacIntosh, 54–69 (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1969).

Since there is certainly no evidence that they wanted to do so in favor of any empirical derivation, it would be natural to assume that they believed that they could avoid Kant's subjective-objective, formal-given dualities and somehow make "the subject" in its a priori self-determination responsible for (constitutive of) far more of experience than Kant had, perhaps even for a substantial portion of the very content of experience (at the very least, perhaps for some general but determinate principles of nature, and determinate principles involved in any explanation and evaluation of human conduct). Fichte's doctrine in his 1794 *Doctrine of Science (Wissenschaftslehre)* that, in experience, the I or ego posits not only itself, but also the not-I, or the nonego, looks like such an attempt to eliminate Kant's dualism between formal and material, spontaneity and the given. But even Fichte had to conclude that such a fully autonomous, self-determining subject of experience was an ideal or "ought" and could only be posited as a goal of an infinite "striving." This did not seem to leave us substantially better off than Kant's noumenal skepticism.

But "ideal" also need not be limited to this subjective meaning. Its original much more Platonic meaning seems to be playing a role in the post-Kantian reaction as well, and that meaning is, by Kantian lights, a robust realism, the alternative to a subjective idealism. In both Schelling and Hegel, and in the more poetical expressions of the "Frühromantik," the early romantic idealists, the "ideal" seems to refer to what they designate as "the Absolute," the "unconditioned" manifested in the conditioned world of nature and spirit, such that the latter are intelligible only as such dependent manifestations.<sup>42</sup> The status of finite, individual objects; any subject's particular activity; even historical events were taken to be elements of an "idealism" by being understood as manifestations or expressions of this ideal Absolute. And there is no question that Schelling was greatly influenced by his reading of Plato's *Philebus* and *Timaeus*<sup>43</sup> during the early years of his idealist period, and that when he refers to an *Ideenlehre*, a doctrine of ideas, he means to give a far more substantial status to Kantian categories and that he and Hegel are given to summarizing their "idealism" by claiming that finite things, considered in their particularity, are not fully "real," that only the Absolute is truly real, and that delimited, finite objects, events, and activities are fully comprehensible only from the viewpoint, as limited manifestations of, this Absolute.<sup>44</sup> It began to seem, that is,

<sup>42</sup> This side of the story is told in detail by Beiser, *German Idealism*. See also, for such a Platonic reading of Hegelian logic, Dieter Henrich, "Kant und Hegel," in *Selbstverhältnisse*.

<sup>43</sup> Both included in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon, 1961).

<sup>44</sup> See Hegel's contrast between subjective and absolute idealism in the Addition to §45 of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, where he claims that "finite things" are "mere phenomena . . . in their nature,"

that a reflective knowledge of “subjective conditions” apart from the material content of knowledge was impossible, but that Kantian reflection had turned us in the right direction (away from the empirical world as sole authority in knowledge claims). Such subjective conditions also had to be “objects” of a special sort, “moments” of the unfolding self-consciousness of absolute mind, knowable in an absolute philosophical reflection not even bound (which could not be bound) by the normal laws of logic (the logic of “the understanding”).

The details of such putative radicalizations of subjective idealism, on the one hand, or this inversion of Kantian idealism into so-called objective idealism, on the other, are obviously book-length subjects. But there are three reasons to suspect, even conceding the inadequacies of such brief summaries, that the directions suggested by these summary formulations are too narrow and so are potentially quite misleading. These were heady times in Germany, and a great many different possibilities and developments were in the air, being tried out and quickly discarded, rapidly reformulated, and so forth. It is probably impossible to give one general narrative that is adequate to all the movements and countermovements. But the major players in the narrative, Kant, the early Fichte, the early Schelling and Hegel, often gave notice that they appreciated something of the originality of Kant’s formulations and were aware that these merely “subjective” and “objective” responses were inadequate.

For one thing, one would certainly expect that any such metaphysical expansion or reversal of Kant’s project would have to take quite seriously the power and scope of his arguments against all traditional rationalism as “dogmatism,” would not merely bypass those objections on the way to new system building. (As noted before, there *were* defenders of traditional metaphysics around, such as Eberhard, but the major players were everywhere eager to ally themselves against “dogmatism” of all forms.) It will not do to say that Schelling and the romantics accepted Kant’s critique of the traditional claims for reason’s power to know a priori, but that they appealed to a different kind of “reason,” a synthetic, integrating attention to the *hen kai pan* totality within which parts could be understood in their true partiality and finitude. Such a supposedly intuitive appeal to wholeness has even less chance against Kant’s critique since there is much less clarity about the source of determinate results, by what

because “they have their existence founded not in themselves but in the universal divine Idea.” *Hegel’s Logic, Being Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) [henceforth EL], 73; *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, Erster Teil, Die Wissenschaft der Logik* (Hegel, *Werke* 8:122). Hegel either means here that all finite things causally depend for their existence on a single creative or emanating force or that no finite thing is intelligible individually, by itself, but only fully intelligible in the light of intelligibility as such (where intelligibility does not simply mean “thinkability” but is understood in a post-Kantian way). I have argued for the latter view in *Hegel’s Idealism*.

right individual claims within any such system can be made and, especially, defended against objections.

And, as if a sign that something closer to Kant's intentions is going on, the constant appeal to "intellectual intuition" as the answer to the epistemological challenge (about how this speculative knowledge is possible) keeps faith with Kant's rejection of the classical notion of a passive intuitive faculty. Any non-sensible intuitive power must, everyone seemed to agree, be an *active*, producing, spontaneous faculty in order not to be limited by, affected by, its object, and there is considerable enthusiasm for the famous passages 76 and 77 in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* for Kant's presentation of the idea of an intuitive intellect. There is also evidence that both Fichte and Schelling were not claiming somehow to know that this self-producing intuitive power was something like the life force of the universe, as if some neo-Platonic One. (The problem we started with was how any such knowledge of the Absolute might be possible. It is hardly an answer to *add*, in effect, to the difficulty by making what seem like more, increasingly arbitrary claims about what reason knows a priori about the cosmos.) In an 1801 letter to Fichte, Schelling claims that his own idea "of the Absolute" is derived from the *Kantian* suggestion about the "identity of thinking and intuiting" altogether (not just as a feature of God's activity but as a feature of ours).<sup>45</sup> And Hegel is even clearer in his early work *Belief and Knowledge*.

The idea of this archetypal intellect is at bottom nothing else but the same idea of the transcendental imagination that we considered above. . . . Thus transcendental imagination is itself intuitive intellect.<sup>46</sup>

This is not the end of the story (how this faculty, now considered constitutive of our experience, overcomes the distinction between possibility and actuality, without producing the objects it intuits [the key characteristic, according to Kant, of an intuitive intellect], is a longer story), but the direction suggested does not appear neo-Platonic or Christian/creationist.<sup>47</sup>

Second, there are indications that later idealists were keeping faith with what they recognized to be one of the most radical and far-reaching of the first *Critique's* innovations. When Kant made such claims as "the object is that in

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in a very helpful book on this topic by Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Anton Hain, 1991), 214–15.

<sup>46</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Belief and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H. Harris (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1977), 89; *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel, GW 4:341.

<sup>47</sup> I have attempted to present a fuller defense of this sort of reading of the 76 and 77 issue in "Avoiding German Idealism: Kant, Hegel, and the Reflective Judgment Problem," in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 129–53.

the concept of which the manifold is united,” or when he insisted that no unity of experience would be possible (self-ascribable to a single subject over time) were we not able to distinguish a mere subjective succession of representations from a representation of objective succession, he did not intend to be providing something like a description of the operations of our mental faculties. When he claimed that all representation of a genuine object could amount to was a certain sort of rule-governed unification, he was not trying to replace spatio-temporal objects with mental states, or mind-dependent products and activities. He meant to point out that any “representation of an object” is a normative (*rule-governed*) claim, a holding to be so and so, subject to the required implications of normative commitments. It is about what in our experience *ought* to be thought together with what, and his idealism consists in accepting the Humean point that such normative unity is not something we can be said to perceive directly in experience. He went on, however, to point out that without any distinction between “this ought to be thought together with that” and “merely happens to be followed by that” a unified experience would not be possible, and he concluded that it must, therefore, be the case that some such normative requirements, especially requirements that experience must be able to exhibit very general kinds of unity (categories) for any representation of content to be possible at all, cannot in any sense be understood as “derived” (that normative authority cannot be understood as based on any claim about what we have so far observed) and must, therefore, be understood as “subjectively” necessary. What is “subjectively” grounded is such a claim to normative *authority*, not mental functioning, ideal archetypes, psychological processes, or episodes of thinking. So all judgment is said to rest on predicative, excluding, and inferring relations that *constrain* what we can intelligibly think and articulate by normatively constraining “what we ought to think,” not by *being* psychological or metaphysical limits. (In this light the objection that Kant’s position is a “subjective idealism” is not an opening to a contrasting romantic realism, but a complaint that Kant’s results should not be characterized as “*merely*” subjective. They are subjective, but Kant has gone some way to removing such “*merely*” qualifiers by the claim for these sorts of “identities” [“the object is that in the concept of which”] that later idealists wanted to emphasize.) Thus the true contrasting term to idealism is not rationalist realism, on the one hand, or partial, finite, incompletely real particulars, on the other. The contrast is between what Sellars called the “space of reasons” and “the space of causes,” between an ideal (that is, not naturally determined) normative domain and a comprehensive or totalistic “naturalism.”<sup>48</sup> This is why Kant’s book is full of such language as “reason has

<sup>48</sup> I should stress that this and the following characterizations are preliminary. It would, for example, be a natural (or at least a Kantian) response to such a characterization to ask whether we

insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design”;<sup>49</sup> “what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself as soon as reason’s common principle has been discovered”;<sup>50</sup> and even that “reason *does not follow the order of things* as they present themselves in appearances, but frames for itself *with perfect spontaneity* an order of its own according to ideas.”<sup>51</sup> He is pointing to the problem of the source of any such normative order (the “ideal” source of such authority “in us”) and raising the great problem correctly detected as such by his successors: *how* could human reason in effect authorize its own claim, and *what*, on such an assumption, could it be said to authorize? What could such a self-authorization look like? (Jacobi’s worry that such a project as a whole is a nonstarter [threatens “nihilism,” rests on “nothing”], not just in moral theory, is thus not irrelevant). In this context, then, “absolute” knowledge, pure ideality, would amount to the achievement of such a wholly autonomous self-authorizing.<sup>52</sup>

The continuation of this problem is clearest in Fichte and his otherwise mysterious references to “self-positing” as ground or origin. He notes in the *Wissenschaftslehre* (*nova methodo*), translated as *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy*, that “the idealist observes that experience in its entirety is nothing but an acting on the part of a rational being.” He then notes in more detail what he means by such idealism.

The idealist observes how there must come to be things for the individual. Thus the situation is different for the individual than it is for the philosopher. The individual is confronted with things, men, etc. that are independent of him. But the idealist says, “There are no things outside me and present independently of me.” Though the two say opposite things, they do not contradict each other. For the idealist, from his own viewpoint, displays the necessity of the individual’s view. When the idealist says “outside of me,” he means “outside of reason”: when the individual says the same thing, he means “outside on my person.”<sup>53</sup>

have any reason to believe that such a rational subscription to principle is at all *possible*, whether freedom, especially as autonomy, is possible. Must we not, as Kant tried to do, carve out some theoretical space for such a possibility? (This is the kind of challenge Karl Ameriks has made, especially with regard to Fichte and my interpretation of Fichte; see *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, 211–16.) A full answer to such a question requires a detailed treatment of the “priority of the practical” thesis in Fichte and others, a thesis that ultimately circumvents rather than answers such a challenge, and how that claim is connected with Fichte’s insistence on the role of faith, or an original practical commitment in even theoretical philosophy.

<sup>49</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxiii.

<sup>50</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axx.

<sup>51</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A548/B576, my emphasis.

<sup>52</sup> See also my “Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: The Realization of Freedom,” in *Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, 180–99.

<sup>53</sup> J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy* (*Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (1797/99), ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 105–6; J. G. Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nach den Vorlesungen von Hr.Pr. Fichte*, in J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen

Fichte even remarks in a note for his Aenesidemus review that “The I is reason.”<sup>54</sup>

Third, it is nicely consistent with this direction that Kant does not discuss concepts as abstract objects or archetypes, and his major successors for the most part were aware of the importance of such a shift. Kant had claimed that concepts should be understood as rules, normative constraints on synthetic and inferential activities.<sup>55</sup>

All cognition requires a concept, however imperfect or obscure it may be; but as far as its form is concerned the latter is something general, and something that serves as a rule. Thus the concept of body serves as the rule for our cognition of outer appearances by means of the unity of the manifold that is thought through it. However it can be a rule of intuitions only if it represents the necessary reproduction of the manifold of given intuitions that is thought through it.<sup>56</sup>

The “necessity” referred to here is certainly not a claim that empirical knowledge amounts to necessary truths. Kant is referring to the claim of normative necessity, which experience can never directly exhibit but cannot violate and without which claims about bodies would not be possible. (In his practical philosophy, where his claims about normative authority are very similar [as “self-legislated”], he refers to this necessitation as a practical necessitation or [normative self-] constraint, a “*Nötigung*.”)

And “All intuitions, as sensible, rest on affections, concepts therefore on functions. By function, however, I understand the unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common one.”<sup>57</sup> Such a notion would, of course, require also a different theory of what it is to understand concepts, and Kant indeed consistently argues that a concept is a “predicate of possible judgments” and thus that to understand a concept is not to grasp a mental or abstract object or archetype, but to understand such a concept “functionally,” or how to use the concept in different contexts, as a predicate of possible judgments.<sup>58</sup>

*Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1965) [henceforth Fichte, GA], 4:25.

<sup>54</sup> Fichte, GA II, 1:287.

<sup>55</sup> The pioneering effort to highlight the importance of Kant’s understanding of concepts as rules was Robert Paul Wolff’s in *Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963). Jonathan Bennett also appreciated the importance of Kant’s characterization: “Kant’s actual working use of ‘concept’ is ... rather thoroughly Wittgensteinian. For him as for Wittgenstein, the interest of concepts lies in the abilities with which they are somehow associated.” *Kant’s Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 54.

<sup>56</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A106.

<sup>57</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A68/B93.

<sup>58</sup> According to Hegel, too, concepts are determinate not by reference to abstract content or real universals but as predicates of possible judgments (understanding the content just is understanding such possible and disallowed roles). But for him the question of possible determinacy is

## HEGEL AND HISTORY

As noted, there are so many topics being discussed at once in the post-Kantian world that it would be a major undertaking to trace out such a theory of “normativity and its origins” in the late eighteenth and first third of the nineteenth century. And while such an approach might suggest a different general direction than the “absolutizing of subjectivity” versus “realist monism” options, numerous very difficult problems remain. How we account for the determinacy of such normative principles or rules, especially if we have decided that there is nothing “in the world” that certifies any determinate candidate, nothing we can “read off” from the architectonic structure of reason, obviously looms very large as a difficulty. And everyone seems to want to avoid the kind of “imposition” metaphor that would require again something like Kant’s noumenal skepticism, but how *else* we are to think of such a mind-world relation so as to avoid this is not immediately apparent. The problems are linked, and there is only space here to point to the Hegelian responses.

First, there are several indications in his *Science of Logic* that Hegel appreciates the properly Kantian origins of his project and that he is clear about how he understands himself to be altering it. He quotes approvingly the important passage cited earlier here. “An object, says Kant, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is unified.”<sup>59</sup>

This is a claim Hegel then quickly translates into his speculative language,

When it is comprehended, the being-in-and-for-itself which it possess in intuition and pictorial thought is transformed into a positedness; the I in thinking pervades it.<sup>60</sup>

With these passages in mind, it seems that Kant and Hegel are making a point similar to one made by Sellars in a linguistic context, that the objective grasp of a concept is nothing other than mastery of the *correct* use of a word and, hence, in Robert Brandom’s extension of this Sellarsean claim, that the sense of any possible nicht-Ich, let us say, any *objective content*, is inseparably linked to the

difficult to limit to concepts alone, since the unit of intelligibility for Hegel is not the concept, or even judgments and judgmental forms, since judgments are determinate as something like arguments in an inferential system, or as places in what Hegel calls “syllogism.” Ultimately, this all means that for Hegel, in his famous claim, the unit of intelligibility is simply the whole, *das Ganze*.

<sup>59</sup> Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969) [henceforth SL], 584. (This is the translation cited, except for the substitution of “concept,” everywhere Miller has “Notion” for *Begriff*.) *Wissenschaft der Logik. Zweiter Band. Die subjektive Logik* (Hegel, Werke 6:18).

<sup>60</sup> SL, 585; Hegel, Werke 2:18. Miller’s translation is a little free. The original reads, “Durch das Begreifen wird, das An-und-Fürsichsein, das er im Anschauen und Vorstellen hat, in ein Gesetzsein verwandelt; Ich durchdringt ihn denkend.”



structure of our *asserting and inferring and justifying practices* (the *norms* governing our “Setzen,” let us say). (And this would mean that our understanding the possibility of an individual object is linked inseparably with, is a function of, our understanding the use of singular terms, that our understanding a possible *fact* is a function of our understanding what can be asserted by a proposition, and our sense of a natural law is a function of our understanding of counter-factual inferring.)<sup>61</sup>

Admittedly, this can seem like pretty thin gruel when we consider the many passages where Hegel insists that “reason” *is* reality, that all that there is is an expression or manifestation of the truly real, Logos, Reason, the Absolute. But here we have to remind ourselves of the extent to which various assumptions in classical, especially Aristotelian, philosophy stand behind Hegel’s commitment to this holism. So, while some formulations of this holism seem to refer to the emanation of some divine mind into its logically necessary moments until the achievement of its full self-consciousness, it is much closer to the spirit of Hegel’s enterprise, I am suggesting, to see the claim about “the rationality of the real” to be an echo of this Greek rationalism with its claim that “to be *is* to be intelligible,” that there is no ineffable, nothing in principle unknowable. (There cannot be miracles, or omnipotent, impassible gods who could cause without being caused. “Nature” is the *only explicans*.)<sup>62</sup> This is extended in Hegel to cover not only the domains of nature and human nature, but the record of human deeds, too. That is, while Hegel accepts the Greek principle of the absolute universality of reason – that to be is to be intelligible – he also distinguishes in a modern or Kantian way between the intelligibility of nature – its conformity to reason – and the meaningfulness of human practices and institutions – activities undertaken for reasons and intelligible only in the light of such reasons. (The grand division in the *Encyclopedia* is between Nature and Spirit.) That is, Hegel accepts the different meanings of “subjection to reason” when this point is recognized, and a storm, the death of a child, a plague, and

<sup>61</sup> See Robert Brandom, “Holism and Idealism in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*,” *Hegel Studien*, ed. Walter Jaeschke and Ludwig Siep, vol. 36 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), 57–92. The assertion of this identity, I maintain, is the core of what Hegel transforms from Schelling’s version into Hegel’s own version of “identity theory.” See *Hegel’s Idealism*, 79–88. Hegel’s somewhat more speculative formulation of what is the same point: “The object therefore has its objectivity in the concept and this is the unity of self-consciousness into which it has been received; consequently, its objectivity or the concept, is itself none other than the nature of self-consciousness, has no other moments or determinations than the I itself” (SL, 585; Hegel, *Werke* 18–19).

<sup>62</sup> There is a great deal of truth in Heidegger’s remark that Hegel was the most radical of the Greeks. See the discussion by Hans Georg Gadamer in his “Hegel and Heidegger,” in *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), 107.

so on, do not *mean* anything.<sup>63</sup> We could say that in the human world, we make meaning, are responsible for the subjection to reasons we ascribe to ourselves and impute to others, but that would only be a half-truth. Making is far too simple a term to capture the claim that the ways things mean what they mean – how, in what sense, reasons for their being so can be demanded – are results, and that we are in some way (a collective, greatly mediated, deeply historical, temporally extended way) responsible for such results.<sup>64</sup>

Then again we come to all of Hegel's objections to the finitude of transcendental philosophy. Kant introduces the possibility, against rationalism, that the forms of thought (understood as in the preceding formulations) might *not* be

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1963), 1–40. The core idea here – the irreducibility, priority, and autonomy of normative commitment in any account of the possibility of cognitive and practical claims – is not a uniform one. There are very different senses of legislation and commitment at issue, even though, I have tried to argue, there is at bottom a common sort of claim for such a priority. See my "Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind," in *Idealism as Modernism*, 29–55, and "Hegel's Practical Philosophy and the Realization of Freedom"; and the discussion by Karl Ameriks in "Zu Kants Argumentation am Anfang des Dritten Abschnitts der Grundlegung," in *Systematische Ethik mit Kant*, eds. Hans-Ulrich Baumgarten and Carsten Held (Freiburg: Alber, 2001), 24–54, and "Pure Reason of Itself Alone Suffices to Determine the Will," in *Immanuel Kant: Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, ed. O. Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 99–114.

<sup>64</sup> While it would yet again be far too involved a topic in this context, we should at least keep in mind that Hegel distinguishes between a genuinely philosophical treatment of such questions of intelligibility and an ordinary pursuit of truth. Different normative issues are at stake, he stresses. Correctness (or *Richtigkeit*), the correspondence notion of truth, is, for example, not something Hegel wants to challenge. For ordinary purposes, that question (does our "conception" "coincide" with its "content"?) is what we mean when we ask whether a proposition is true. However, truth (*Wahrheit*), as Hegel considers it, is a different issue and, again, concerns "the coincidence of the object with itself, that is, with its concept" (EL 237; Hegel, GW 8:323). Moreover, Hegel, in a way that sounds somewhat strange to us, also distinguishes, as the bearer of philosophical claims, propositions from judgments. Partly he means to distinguish questions about the structure and truth conditions of logical content alone, from the rules and conditions for subjective acts of asserting and inferring (i.e., those dimensions of judgmental logic that would generate later worries about psychologism in neo-Kantianism). But this distinction quickly leads to those speculative dimensions of a judgmental logic that interest him. In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, he distinguishes mere propositional assertions like "I slept well last night" and "A carriage is passing by" from genuine *judgments*. These are properly asserted when they are asserted *against* some possible objection or doubt and truly embody our judgmental ability (in the sense recognizable in Kant, and in Aristotle, as the expression of sound judgment or mother wit or *l'esprit de finesse*) all in a way dependent on what Hegel calls the "logical value [Wert] of judgments," a dimension he connects with "the logical significance of the predicate." Judgment in this latter sense is not required to determine that "The wall is green," or "Water freezes at 0° centigrade," in the way it is when someone judges that a work of art is beautiful, or that some human quality is good or that some political decision was just, or how to understand the relation between essence and appearance, or the unconditioned and the conditioned, or force and its expression, or among universality, particularity, and individuality (EL §171 Anm.). It is also important to remember that at the beginning of the "Logic of the Concept," when Hegel wants to point to the importance of the question "What is truth?" he does not cite as his example Socrates, or Spinoza, or Kant; he cites Pontius Pilate's question.

the forms of objects and thinks he needs to close that gap, and he does so with some version of an imposition claim that creates the untenable phenomena-noumena distinction. Hegel makes very clear several times that he thinks this imposition idea is fatal to the Kantian philosophy and its descendants, that it is *the* “principal misunderstanding” (*hauptsächlicher Mißverstand*).<sup>65</sup> It leaves us with a kind of second-class and so unsatisfying “truth.” The misunderstanding, for Hegel, is the assumption that there is any gap to be closed.

That is, Hegel’s response to this is to insist on a Kantian insight to which Hegel thinks Kant does not remain fully faithful. Probably the most well-known formula quoted from Kant’s first *Critique* occurs at A51/B75. It is the claim also quoted by Hegel at a crucial point in his own exposition of Kant in this section of the *Science of Logic*. After Kant had distinguished the faculties of the understanding and intuition, he asserted that “neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other,” and that “without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought.” He then asserted his famous epigram: “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.” Concept and intuition, even mind and world, must be understood as *inseparable*, but precisely not as *indistinguishable*, as if collapsed into one another (as in many charges of “panlogicism” against Hegel).

The phrase has become as familiar as the well-known implication that foundationalist empiricisms of all sorts, whether early British or later positivist versions, are impossible. The idea of a “given” has been exposed as a “myth.” The mere deliverances of sensibility cannot found anything. They are blind. Yet the epigram itself, while so familiar, is also paradoxical, even dialectical. By parity of reasoning, if the understanding and intuition really are inseparably linked (neither contribution to experience can be understood except as already in relation to the other), then not only would a foundationalist empiricism be impossible, but the standard picture of a priori knowledge, or a philosophical “logic,” even a Kantian a priorism and a transcendental logic, will have to be revised. That is, thoughts, concepts considered apart from intuitions, are *empty*. Or at least they are *cognitively* empty, without cognitive significance. There is something like a “logical content” in any pure thought, although it is not entirely clear what that is, and this will be appealed to when Kant claims that empirically independent reason can legislate a unity regulatively, if not constitutively, apart from reliance on intuitional content. But Kant still insists that, strictly speaking, the content of the forms of thought considered cognitively, as having objective purport, must count as “empty” except insofar as that content is supplied by intuition. But intuitions are supplied empirically,

<sup>65</sup> SL, 587; Hegel, *Werke*, 2:21.

and this seems to make such content always empirically dependent in some way.<sup>66</sup> Kant thought he could provide that content by availing himself of what he actually called at one point, mysteriously, “transcendental content.”<sup>67</sup> He could do justice to the inseparable intuitive content of concepts and preserve a notion of a priori knowledge by appeal to the claim that there were *pure* forms of intuition, and so there could be a way, independent of actual experience, to specify sufficiently something of the experiential nonconceptual content of any pure concept and could do so a priori.

But taking this “inseparability” thesis quite seriously also points to Hegel’s response to the second problem about philosophical methodology and determinacy of results. There is a passage from the *Encyclopedia* that already gestures in such a direction.

*Philosophy, then, owes its development to the empirical sciences.* In return it gives their contents what is so vital to them, the freedom of thought – gives them in short an *a priori* character. These contents are now warranted necessary, and no longer depend on the evidence of the facts merely, that they were so found and so experienced. The fact as experienced thus becomes an illustration and a copy of the original and completely self-supporting activity of thought.<sup>68</sup>

This passage indicates that articulating and justifying the normative authority of the claim, without appeal to a given, a pure form of intuition, or by reversion to an imposition claim, *is* what “giving content” the “shape of the freedom of thought” amounts to. And the passage also reveals what Hegel regards as the consequences of Kant’s inseparability thesis: the reliance of philosophy on what Hegel took to be *the historical development of spirit*, both in its attempts at knowledge and self-knowledge, and in its institution of social and practical norms. The Introduction and the Preface to the *Phenomenology* raise the issue of philosophical methodology exactly that way.

Hegel’s claim to be able to replace a “critique,” with its conflicting assumptions about both the separability of the form of knowledge from its material and its insistence on their deep inseparability, with a “phenomenology” that rejects any such formal methodology and remains truer to the inseparability claim is the initial manifestation in his project of a way of treating claims to

<sup>66</sup> This position might amount to something similar in Whewell, and, as we shall see later, certainly in Hegel, but it is not orthodox Kantianism.

<sup>67</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A79/B105.

<sup>68</sup> EL 18; Hegel, GW 8:38. (“Indem die Philosophie so ihre Entwicklung den empirischen Wissenschaften verdankt, gibt sie deren Inhalte die wesentlichste Gestalt der Freiheit [des Apriorischen] des Denkens und die Bewährung der Notwendigkeit, statt der Beglaubigung des Vorfindens und der erfahrenen Tatsache, daß die Tatsache zur Darstellung und Nachbildung der ursprünglichen und vollkommenen selbstständigen Tätigkeit des Denkens werde.”)

know and to act well that is both much more historicized and more integrative, more concerned with the relation between such norms and a form of life or shape of spirit as a whole. He insists that

consciousness, however, is explicitly the concept of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself. . . . Thus consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands; it spoils its own limited satisfaction.<sup>69</sup>

Because of this, Hegel believes he can claim that

we do not need to import criteria, or to make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry; it is precisely when we leave these aside that we succeed in contemplating the matter in hand as it is in and for itself.<sup>70</sup>

If we simply look on, then the source of the determinate norms accepted and modified or discarded can be said to be experience itself, in the self-examining, ultimately self-authorizing sense Hegel wants to give such a notion.

Claims like these raise their own questions, of course. They assume a great existential power to the force of reason in human life, all such that

when consciousness feels this [its own] violence, its anxiety may well make it retreat from the truth and strive to hold on to what it is in danger of losing. But it can find no peace. If it wishes to remain in a state of unthinking inertia, then thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest disturbs its inertia.<sup>71</sup>

And they assume then Hegel can maintain some appropriate balance between what we have been calling the inseparability thesis about concept and intuition, mind and world even, and the distinguishability thesis, the avoidance of either an implausible panlogicism or some appeal to a divinely creative intellect. He may not have succeeded in either task, but I have tried to argue here only that these are the issues he must deal with, and that they represent an important extension of a thesis about the normative dimensions of thought and action initiated by Kant's Copernican revolution.

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<sup>69</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), [henceforth PhS], 51; *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden*, vol. 2 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1999).

<sup>70</sup> PhS, 54; Hegel, GW 2:59.

<sup>71</sup> PhS, 51; Hegel, GW 2:57.

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## THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The social conditions for doing philosophy in the nineteenth century remain, by and large, the same social conditions for doing philosophy in the twentieth and, so far, also in the twenty-first century: Universities remain for all practical purposes the sole place where philosophy of any quality is pursued, and one must have an advanced degree in order to gain employment in such universities. Unlike some novelists, philosophers cannot live off the royalties from their writings, and they are only rarely put to work in non-university research units. (Perhaps the growth of “ethics advisers” will change that, but it is unlikely.) In the nineteenth century, there were, of course, several outstanding exceptions to this rule. Kierkegaard was not a member of a university; nor were Schopenhauer, Marx, or Mill. (Nor was Emerson, although it is more controversial to classify him as a philosopher.) Nietzsche started out in the university but not as a philosopher, and his philosophical works (with the exception of *The Birth of Tragedy*) came to be written outside the university altogether. All of them, though, had some exceptional circumstances that enabled them to do this. Moreover, each (with Mill the exception) had to fight against the familiar prejudices of university philosophers that those writing outside the university failed to exercise the rigor and standards enforced within the philosophical faculties of the university. Each failed to get recognition from university professors of philosophy until late in life or after his death. In the twentieth century, philosophers such as Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus managed to have careers outside the university, and Bertrand Russell had a long non-university career, but they are unusual exceptions. Part of Martin Heidegger’s career was spent outside the university, but this was because of his rather unfortunate political involvements.

Nonetheless, during the nineteenth century the practice of philosophy and philosophy’s standing itself underwent profound changes that were part and parcel of the equally profound changes that the university as an institution was undergoing. By the end of the eighteenth century, there was widespread sentiment in Europe that the university had become a thoroughly outmoded

institution. Many held it to be simply a medieval fossil in the modern world, staffed by a privileged – these days we would anachronistically say, “tenured” – faculty who taught useless knowledge and only provided an environment in which students could carouse and drink themselves into a stupor. They were also increasingly turning out graduates who could not find employment (particularly in theology, where the older pastors were refusing to die fast enough to keep pace with those newly seeking such positions). Students were aware of that, and by the end of the eighteenth century, enrollment at, for example, German universities, was in a sharp decline – so sharp in fact that many German universities themselves were dying off at an unprecedented rate. Universities were not centers of research virtually at all; they were centers of teaching (as it were). What we would nowadays call “research” took place almost entirely outside the university, often in some kind of royal institute or under some wealthy patron. For these reasons, much enlightened opinion sought to abolish universities altogether and replace them with something more like research institutes and centers for technical learning.

This changed in the nineteenth century, and Kant’s last published work, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, was in effect the heralding of that transformation. By Kant’s time, the German university had settled down into a familiar shape. It had four faculties: philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, and medicine. Theology was the dominant faculty, and in most universities, the theology faculty had to pass judgment on what books the other faculties could use in their teaching. The study of philosophy, moreover, was generally construed as simply a propaedeutic to the study of theology, a set of preparatory courses, as it were, for study of what really counted. (The faculty of philosophy had by and large absorbed all the traditional liberal arts that had traditionally constituted the propaedeutic for study in theology, law, and medicine in the medieval university.) Kant’s argument (as evidenced especially in his own work) was that philosophy had finally managed to free itself from the tutelage of the other faculties since philosophy rested on the authority of reason itself, which had achieved a certain self-critical autonomy. Unlike, for example, legal studies, in which jurists had to rely on what the legislators enacted, philosophy did not have to rely on any positive “givens.” Thus, not only should philosophy be taken as a discipline in its own right, not merely as the propaedeutic to theological study: it had become in fact the discipline that offered the critical basis for all the other faculties.

Kant’s own proposals came to fruition quite indirectly in the reform of the university in the small provincial town of Jena. Jena was a small town in Saxony, whose population rarely rose above about forty-five hundred. The university was not well endowed; it was not a traditionally strong center of



learning (even though Leibniz had briefly studied there). Also, in what turned out to be a stroke of incredibly good luck for it, its governing princes cared little for it and gave it virtually no thought. (Because of some dynastic complications, Jena had to answer not to one but to four different Thuringian nobles of Weimar, Coburg, Gotha, and Meiningen.) The four princes, themselves each by and large indifferent to higher education, paid little attention to Jena. Thus, in 1775, when Jena came under the authority of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, the newly appointed minister to the prince in Weimar (a town just a few kilometers down the road), Jena was able to offer professors a freedom of thought and activity that were unprecedented anywhere else in Europe.

Kant's first *Critique* had only been published in 1781 and had, after an initially slow start, taken the German intellectual world by storm. By 1785, Jena became the first place where professors were offering lectures on Kant's philosophy. The leading intellectual journal of its day, the *Jena Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung*, was also being edited in Jena, and (besides becoming an organ of the newly emerging Kantian philosophy) it offered intellectuals relatively hefty honoraria for articles they published in it. The addition of the poet and critic Friedrich Schiller to the faculty in 1789 increased the luster of the place, so much so that many people were drawn to Jena just to be around the literary celebrities, Goethe and Schiller, and the other literary types they attracted. Because of its success, and Goethe's nurturing of the university and intellectual environment, Jena quickly added a number of "extraordinary" professors to its faculties. These were professors – such as Schiller – who were not part of the "ordinary" professorship (professors whose salaries were funded by the university's endowment), but instead, whose salaries were paid from elsewhere, such as from the prince's own discretionary funds.<sup>1</sup> Within a very brief time, many of Jena's leading luminaries were such "extraordinary" professors, and the regular, "ordinary" professors at Jena began to resent the diminution of their own powers and the extra prestige the other faculty carried with them, even though the extraordinary professors by and large did not have substantially larger salaries.

Students flocked to Jena to study with the new stars of the German intellectual world, and that trend increased the income of the professors teaching there. At that time, students had to pay professors directly to attend the lectures, and professors were also permitted (one might say, "obliged," given the salaries at universities) to charge students for the exams they gave them.

<sup>1</sup> The "extraordinary" professors were part of the German system as a whole, which required a special examination and thesis (now called the Habilitation) to give the right to teach. Acquiring the right to teach, however, did not entail a right to be paid for it; thus not all "extraordinary" professors had such incomes.

(One often bought a “ticket” to a lecture from a professor.) The university, on the other hand, was not obliged to provide lecture halls to any professor, so the faculty had to make their own provisions in such matters. (Many professors added substantially to their incomes by housing students in their houses, using large rooms in their houses as lecture halls, and charging other less well-endowed professors for the privilege of lecturing there.) There were also a number of “extraordinary” professors at Jena who were paid no salary at all and had to subsist totally on student lecture fees and examination costs. (For most of his career at Jena, Hegel was such an “extraordinary” professor, living mostly off his small inheritance after his father’s death in 1799.)

One of the characteristics that set Jena off from other universities, besides its strong emphasis on academic freedom, was the centrality of philosophy, as we now understand it, to its fame and its success. Philosophy, in its Kantian sense, indeed cut itself loose from its dependence on other faculties, as Kant had demanded, and at Jena, it took center stage. In 1786, Karl Leonhard Reinhold published the first version of his *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, in which he argued in a way lucidly intelligible to more general readers that Kant had effectively solved the problem of the relation between reason and faith with his distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves. Once Kant himself said some good words about the piece, Reinhold’s career was launched. In 1787, Reinhold was made an “extraordinary” professor at Jena, and, as the word got out that going to Königsberg to study with Kant was out of the question, many students who were interested in this new line of thought – stressing the mind’s spontaneity and the necessity of autonomy in morals – flocked to Jena to hear Reinhold lecture. There, working within the “spirit” if not the “letter” of Kant’s thought, Reinhold lectured on how Kantian philosophy was to be cleaned up, its arguments put into better order, and its overall claims systematized. The Kantianism of Jena and its freedom became well enough established so that even Kant himself submitted his book *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* to the Jena philosophical faculty for approval (knowing full well that the theological faculties at other Prussian universities would almost certainly turn it down). Jena, of course, approved its content, and because of the legalities of the day, approval by the Jena philosophical faculty meant approval for publication in Prussia. (Although it was approved by the philosophical faculty at Jena, some Jena theologians were nonetheless reported to be offended by it.)

The appeal of philosophy to these young people was intense. For the generation born around 1770, there was a growing sentiment that life in Europe was on the verge of fundamental change, indeed, that life simply *had* to change. That generation came to see themselves as leading unprecedented lives, unable to take their bearings from what their parents and grandparents had done,

and they took to Kant's doctrines of moral autonomy and non-rule-bound aesthetic judgment as guides to what shape this new form of self-directed life would take. The Jena model of the university, with unorthodox Kantian philosophy at its center, and the stress on autonomy and self-criticism that accompanied it, was a natural attraction for these youth.

In this respect, Jena differentiated itself from the other major new university of the period, at Göttingen. The university at Göttingen was founded by the Hannoverian princes in 1737, and it deliberately downplayed theology and even philosophy in its curriculum (although, curiously enough, shifting theology away from its traditional preeminence made Göttingen the leading center for enlightened biblical criticism). In the German universities of the time, students hoping to find government employment in administrative posts studied law, and the curriculum offered by the jurisprudential faculties included rudimentary versions of what we nowadays would call the social sciences. In Germany, that included the study of "cameralism," a specifically German theory of fiscal administration, which held that fiscal tasks should be both administratively centralized and made more uniform and that the goal of government was to administer rationally the supposedly harmonious whole of society in a manner that increased the state's wealth.<sup>2</sup> (That this assumption about the harmonious nature of German society was a myth became painfully obvious in the wake of the impact that the French Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic Wars had upon German society.) Göttingen aimed at bringing cameralism up to date by virtue of employing professors who were, more or less, helping to invent social science at the time. It offered them high salaries (at least relative to what other universities were paying) and freedom of thought and research. It self-consciously sought to attract only famous professors, and it also aimed at recruiting a type of student who could pay higher fees for the privilege of studying up-to-date practical matters with those famous professors: namely, the nobility (who had traditionally disdained going to university, preferring instead to attend a "knightly academy" [a *Ritterakademie*], where the emphasis was not so much on acquiring practical knowledge as it was on becoming the German version of a Renaissance gentleman).<sup>3</sup> (The nobility had typically thought that they would simply hire university graduates to run their dominions for them; they themselves focused on more gentlemanly pursuits.) To attract those types, Göttingen also offered instruction in "dancing, drawing, fencing, riding, music,

<sup>2</sup> See Mack Walker, *German Hometowns: Community, State, and General Estate, 1648–1871* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971), chap. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Charles E. McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany: 1700–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 33.

and conversation in modern languages.”<sup>4</sup> Göttingen’s ambitions bore fruit: Even though the nobility made up only 2 percent of the population, they composed more than 13 percent of the students at Göttingen. The stables housing the students’ horses were among the largest set of buildings at the university.

Göttingen thus offered a course of study that aimed at practical knowledge, and its overall curriculum and feel appealed to the noble or up-and-coming commoner who wished for a more rounded life while acquiring some practical know-how. Jena, on the other hand, was a more intellectually oriented place, which departed from the Göttingen idea of training “gentlemen” for practical pursuits. Schiller more or less formulated the Jena ideal in his inaugural address for his professorship at Jena. In his 1789 address “What Does It Mean and to What End Do We Study Universal History?” Schiller distinguished between what he called the *Brotgelehrte* and the *philosophischer Kopf*, that is, the difference between the student who attends the university only in order to acquire skills enabling him to enter a profession (the *Brotgelehrte*, the “bread-scholar”) and the student who attends solely out of the love of learning (the *philosophischer Kopf*, the “philosophical head”). Only the philosophical mind, Schiller argued, really belongs in a university. Jena, it was clear, would aim at the “philosophical mind,” and with the acquisition of Reinhold, then Fichte, who succeeded Reinhold after he left for a better-paying position in Kiel, Jena carved out a model of the university dedicated to the life of the mind. More importantly, Jena changed the image of the professor. By the end of the eighteenth century, the academic professor had become a figure of fun, always being caricatured as stiff, pedantic, quick to defend his turf, and out of touch with the world, an antiquated figure right out of the corporate world of the Middle Ages. Jena, where post-Kantian philosophy was born, offered a different model of the professor. The appeal of Kantian (and post-Kantian) thought lay in its striving self-consciously to be modern, to be a form of thought that insisted that one learn to think for oneself (as Kant had famously enjoined in his essay “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?”). In Jena, the modern university took shape as the place where such self-critical thought took root and was institutionalized, and the lectures by people such as Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and others (including Hegel, who was more or less unknown at the time) were exercises in formulating the cutting edge of philosophical thought, and not the rote recitation of received learning in textbooks. The pursuit of truth for its own sake rather than “dancing, drawing, fencing, riding, music, and conversation in modern languages” became Jena’s watchword. At Jena, teaching and research at the university were fused for the first time. The “philosophical

<sup>4</sup> McClelland, *State, Society, and University*, 45.

faculty” – or what eventually became in American parlance the college of arts and sciences – took center stage since it incorporated, as Kant had put it, the autonomy of critical reason, and philosophy per se, in a clearly recognizable modern form, which embodied the goals of the Jena model of the university as the discipline that united all the various other elements of the “philosophical faculty.” Friedrich Schlegel, one of the luminaries of Jena and one of the founders of “romanticism” there (he even coined the term), described Jena as a “symphony of professors.” At Jena, the professor ceased to be the antiquated pedant and became instead the hero, the person who was struggling to fashion a new mode of thought and to teach others how to do it. Whereas intellectuals in the Enlightenment had started to think of themselves as members of the borderless “republic of letters,” at Jena, members of the “republic of letters” acquired salaried positions.

Unfortunately, Jena’s crucial strength – its position as a backwater that put it out of the purview of ambitious princes and thus allowed it to give its professors the freedom they wanted – also was its crucial weakness. A series of events led to Jena’s downfall by 1803. Between Fichte’s coming to the university in 1794 and 1803, the Napoleonic Wars effectively redrew the map of Germany, and new universities were being founded as older ones were being refounded (that is, started up again more or less from scratch). These new foundings drew on the successes of both Jena and Göttingen. In 1799, in a shocking development, Fichte was dismissed from the university on trumped-up charges of atheism. Many of Jena’s leading lights, who had reconciled themselves to their lowly salaries in order to enjoy the freedom and excitement that Jena offered, began to see just how fragile Jena’s vaunted freedom of thought was. As other opportunities opened up, they in turn left. (There is also a bit more to the story, having to do with the way in which Weimar’s prince also felt it more incumbent to build a larger palace for himself than to attend to the needs of the university, a fact that the faculty did not fail to notice.) The *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung* also left Jena. In some ways, the last gasp of Jena’s former greatness was Hegel’s publication in 1807 of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, followed immediately by his own departure from the university the same year – as Jena could not pay him a salary he could even hope to live on.

Jena’s creation, however, of a modern, “philosophical university” left its mark. In 1809, the Berlin university opened with its mission defined more or less in terms of the Jena model: The university was to be the central institution of modern life, the place where the movers and shakers of modern society were to be trained, and the “philosophical faculty” (*not* the theology faculty) was to be the central faculty of the university. Moreover, it was to be dedicated to the “unity of teaching and research,” to be the place where the promising

young minds of the day were to go to study with the leading researchers of the time, who in their lectures and seminars would impart to them not textbook learning but the state of the art in contemporary thought. It was also the first German university to guarantee its professors a heated lecture hall, so that the older custom of having to rent space died out.

At Berlin, the discipline of philosophy was supposed to be the focal point at which all the studies joined, and in which the student learned how all the scattered teachings of the university merged into one synoptic picture. Although the first rector of the newly founded Berlin University was Fichte, the dominating figure during the early, formative period of the university was Hegel, who would embody for many the ideal of the university itself (and, as we know, for many others, would embody something very different). Hegel's own conception of an "encyclopedia" of the philosophical "sciences" – the *Wissenschaften*, which in German does not carry the exclusive connotation of "natural science" as its English translation suggests – fit this model perfectly.<sup>5</sup> In the terms of his own system, Hegel offered a synoptic overview of the ways in which the otherwise scattered disciplines of the natural sciences, history, philology, art history, and theology all fit together into one story about humanity's quest to understand and determine for itself what it genuinely meant to be a human being – or, in Hegel's own terms, of how *Geist*, spirit, arrived at a full self-consciousness about itself. Moreover, like many of his colleagues, he did not carry out this project as much in his writings – Hegel actually did not publish very much – opting instead to carry out his project in his lectures, in which, in a much less intimidating vocabulary than found in his writings, he would go into greater detail about the structure of the history of philosophy, the philosophy of art, philosophy of nature, and the like, before a crowd of students. The philosophy lecture, with its picture of the "heroic" professor struggling to make a philosophical argument in front of the students – with the professor, that is, enacting the process of philosophical thought and argumentation before the students instead of reading out the cut-and-dried teachings of some textbook or another – became the Berlin model.

Probably no other model of the university and of philosophy's place in it has had greater impact than the Jena/Berlin conception of the university.

<sup>5</sup> Hegel published his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* in 1817 (substantially enlarging it in 1827, then again in 1830) as a kind of overview in summary form of his entire system, but it was intended, as the title page explicitly said, for use in his lectures. Along with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in 1807, and the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, published in 1820, it was one of the three major books he published in his life. (*The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, published in 1801, should be counted more as a long monograph than a real book; in his Berlin years, Hegel himself did not even own a copy.)

Departing from the older collegiate model of the university as a place where either aspiring administrators or pastors could receive their training in the proper orthodoxy (and, along the way, be helped along in their progression to “gentlemanly” status), the new Jena/Berlin model substituted the university as a place of cutting-edge “research,” in which philosophy was to be the linchpin of such research, in which people learned to think for themselves instead of being trained in the proper orthodoxy. The picture of the university as a union of teaching and research, with the “philosophical faculty” (or, in the American idiom, the college of arts and sciences) as the centerpiece of the whole structure, exercised an enormous influence on the development of other universities in Europe and in other parts of the world. This new model of the university put new demands on students, forcing them to pay more attention to scholarly details than had previously been the case (and by creating a new set of expectations for students thus helped to shape a different kind of student body than had been in universities before). The focus on the unity of teaching and research also led to a more structured model for hiring professors that emphasized academic qualifications, thereby breaking with the older, guild structure that encouraged cronyism and nepotism. (Many professorships in German universities prior to this period were passed on from father to son.) The consequence of this, however, was that the German university ceded its earlier medieval independence and became dependent instead on the government bureaucracy that funded it. (Even though the American universities took over much of the ideal of the Berlin university, the distinction between private and public universities recognized in law after the Supreme Court ruling in 1819 in the Dartmouth College case gave those problems a different shape for American universities.)

Although today it might be taken for granted, at the time of the birth of the new university model at Jena and the founding of the new Berlin university, there was a fierce debate in Germany as to whether technical institutes should take over the function of institutions of education and universities in particular. Clearly, the Jena/Berlin model was pitted against any conception of an institution offering only technical education. Proponents of the “philosophical” university sometimes cited Kant’s distinction between freedom and happiness as characterizing the difference. That is, technical institutes only aimed at making their students fit for professional work, that is, at happiness, whereas universities would make them free by encouraging and embodying critical self-reflection. It is worthwhile to remember, though, that this was the *ideal* of the “philosophical university,” not its full reality. Not surprisingly, the great majority of students still signed up for studies in law, and the faculty at Berlin frequently grumbled about the students’ lack of interest in intellectual matters.

(The *Brotgelehrte*, the vocationally minded student so pilloried by Schiller and despised by the new “research” faculty of the Jena/Berlin university, continued in his single-minded insistence on learning only “useful subjects” and his search for certification in the form of a degree instead of intellectual probing; such students remain, of course, with us today.)

The Berlin model became a part of the worldwide model for universities. In other countries, such as France, philosophy became the central discipline for institutions of higher learning, which stemmed in part from Victor Cousin’s reorganization of the French higher educational system in the nineteenth century – Cousin was a friend of Hegel, and Hegel had even helped Cousin avoid imprisonment after his arrest by the Prussians under the phony charge of being a “demagogue” (a “subversive”).<sup>6</sup> To this day, the philosophy examination in France for the baccalaureate degree (required for study in the university or in one of the *Grand Écoles*) remains a crucial feature of French higher education. In the United States in the late nineteenth century, the Berlin model became transformed into the “graduate school,” which was grafted on top, as it were, of the traditional American college. The newer Berlin model, however, also shifted the emphasis of the American college in the direction of more research, although the tensions between the traditional “collegiate” training of the whole person and the more research-oriented graduate school have never left the American university. In both Britain and the United States, though, it was literature and not philosophy that ended up playing the role of the central faculty, a distinction that had as much to do with the notion of preserving a national heritage in a time of rising nationalism as it did with anything else, taking the form of a debate about the “canon” in the United States and about the “tradition” in Britain.<sup>7</sup> To this day, disputes in literary departments in the United States get far more public attention than do similar disputes in philosophy departments.

Although philosophy was the centerpiece of the new Berlin university, the so-called golden age of philosophy in the Berlin university died with Hegel. Not only did Hegel’s prestige follow him into the grave, philosophy itself never quite recovered. The historians, led by people like Leopold von Ranke, who had always been quite suspicious if not outright disdainful of what they regarded as the hubris and pretensions of the Hegelians, quickly distanced

<sup>6</sup> See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), for the fuller account of Hegel’s relation to Cousin.

<sup>7</sup> See Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), for a good if somewhat slanted discussion of the differences between the Anglo-American and Continental traditions in conceptions of what counted as the central faculty of the modern university.



themselves from the philosophers. The explosion in the natural sciences in the latter part of the nineteenth century – sometimes called the “second scientific revolution” – even further reduced the importance of philosophy in the overall mission and curricular structure of the research university. The “philosophical faculty” became more and more the “college of arts and sciences,” and philosophy became only one faculty among many vying for money, prestige, and university resources.

Even more important to the role of philosophy in the university was one of Hegel’s successors, the staunchly anti-Hegelian Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg (1802–72). Trendelenburg, a major figure in university and cultural politics in addition to being a first-rate scholar and philosopher, also vigorously asserted the role of philosophy as a “foundational” discipline in the universities. But in his sense, philosophy was the discipline that investigated the otherwise unreflected presuppositions made by the other disciplines. More importantly, though, he initiated the philologically disciplined seminar in philosophy and thus, curiously enough, had more of an impact historically on how philosophy students were taught to do philosophy than did Hegel (who confined himself to the lecture hall).<sup>8</sup> With Trendelenburg’s lead, philosophy began to become more and more professionalized.

The second great blow to the dominance of philosophy in the Berlin university had to do with the failure of Schelling’s attempt in the 1840s (at the same time that Trendelenburg was charting another way for philosophy within the university) to reestablish philosophy as the central discipline of the “philosophical faculties.” After Hegel’s death, the new king in Prussia, who was quite conservative, wished to reestablish more traditional authority in light of what he thought were disturbing, even revolutionary, tendencies emerging from the Hegelian school. To that end, he called Schelling to Berlin to assume a special professorship with no real duties and an inflated salary. The king and others apparently thought that Schelling, who himself had also become quite conservative by this time, would by virtue of the force of his lectures set things aright. In fact, the letter sent to Schelling requesting that he take on this position not only managed to include the famous injunction to “stamp out the dragon-seed of Hegelian pantheism” in Berlin, but also expressed the king’s hope that Schelling’s lectures would also put an end to the “dissolution of domestic discipline” in Prussia.<sup>9</sup> (The king seemed to think that women were not only demanding, but actually getting too much

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion in Volker Gerhardt, Reinhard Mehring, and Jana Rindert, *Berliner Geist: Eine Geschichte der Berliner Universitätsphilosophie* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> See F. W. J. Schelling, “Aus Bunsens Berufungsschreiben an Schelling,” in *Philosophie der Offenbarung: 1841–42*, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 486.

freedom, or at least that Prussian men were somehow failing to assert their natural and proper authority.) It was patently absurd to pin such high hopes on anybody, especially a philosopher, to solve such problems merely through a series of lectures; thus Schelling was bound to fail no matter how brilliantly he performed. At Schelling's inaugural lecture the audience included Engels, Kierkegaard, and Bakunin; later on, people such as Turgenev attended them. Unfortunately, by all contemporary accounts, Schelling performed far short of the standard of "brilliance," and attendance at his lectures, which had initially been huge, started to drop off dramatically. When it became evident that he soon would be lecturing to an empty hall, Schelling prudently declared that he would cease lecturing in order to devote more time to his research.

Schelling's failure marked an entire generation. The so-called Young Hegelians who were taking an increasingly leftward turn (such as Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx) were disgusted with what they perceived as Schelling's obscurantism and with the increasing professionalization of philosophy in the university. To make matters worse, they were not able to find jobs within the university; thus they set to work out a more practical philosophy outside the confines of the university. The university's rejection of Arthur Schopenhauer also led him to lead a life as a private philosopher. (Schopenhauer was independently wealthy and did not need the income; his revenge was to become the most widely read philosopher after the failures of the 1848 revolutions in Germany.)

However, even before Schelling's spectacular failure in Berlin (however one judges the intrinsic merit of his later works), the winds were already beginning to shift. In 1827–8, Alexander von Humboldt, who had never accepted a professorship at the Berlin university, returned to give some public lectures, "The Physical Description of the World." The lectures were a resounding success, attended by all sorts of grandees of the Berlin world (even the king himself), and in them Humboldt both laid out his own views of the importance of empirically based natural science and attacked the kind of *Naturphilosophie* practiced in a very metaphysical version by Schelling and in a more conceptual version by Hegel. (Hegel himself was incensed at first by this but was mollified when he was led to believe that it was not he who was being attacked.)<sup>10</sup> As some of those who rose to fame in the natural sciences later noted, Humboldt's lectures marked the turning point in the Berlin university away from the kind of idealism represented by Hegel and toward the more naturalistic version of philosophy that came to play such a huge role in German thought by the end of the century.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, for the details on Humboldt's and Hegel's clash on this matter.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion in Gerhardt, Mehring, and Rindert, *Berliner Geist*, 103–8.

A similar generational shift in attitudes to philosophy took place in the United States after the Civil War (as Louis Menand has recently taken pains to argue).<sup>12</sup> The crisis in Germany brought on by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had led younger Germans of (roughly) the 1770 generation to see their lives as unprecedented and to imagine a new future for themselves that found its conceptual articulation in the Kantian notions of spontaneity, autonomy, and non-rule-bound aesthetic judgment. Post-Kantian idealism, with its stress on the defeasibility of our norms, articulated their concerns. The Civil War in America, on Menand's account, likewise led a generation of young Americans to lose faith in the traditional certitudes of their parents' generation and to mistrust all forms of certainty and claims to absolute knowledge. Menand argues that this cultural mood was the incubator for the peculiarly American philosophy of pragmatism, with its emphasis on the defeasibility of all knowledge and on science as a self-correcting enterprise. As American universities began to incorporate the ideals of the Berlin university, those interested in philosophy went increasingly into university life as a means of pursuing the newly established profession of philosophy as an ongoing critical activity, and not as the transmission of tradition as found in the textbooks, even though it was pragmatism as well as idealism that expressed that spirit in the United States (indeed, pragmatism rapidly displaced the kind of idealism practiced by Josiah Royce and the St. Louis Hegelians in the American system).

By the end of the century in the United States, one of the major obsessions of all the emerging "disciplines" of the Berlin-influenced American universities and colleges was how to distinguish "science" from "charlatanism." Indeed, it was a major obsession in American society at the time, as it was in all the industrially booming nations of Europe, since the number of quacks running around offering "scientific" solutions to various ailments or proposing "scientific" solutions to personal and social problems was, after all, rather high.<sup>13</sup> In the search to separate respectable, responsible science from quackery, philosophy was no exception. Philosophy, like all the other disciplines, became concerned to turn itself into something more rigorous, into a "science" (just as Kant and Hegel had earlier tried to do for it), so that it would secure its place in the modern, increasingly secular university as a true discipline, not as disguised or even overt charlatanry. (This was true even though the full

<sup>12</sup> See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), for a discussion of how this affected the discipline of history.

secularization of the American university did not come about until the latter half of the twentieth century.) The new model of science, though, was not the older idea of *Wissenschaft*, rigorous theory, but that of natural science, and that was to have profound effects on the practice of philosophy in the newly emerging “research” universities as to how professors in philosophy were to be trained and how they were to be evaluated and promoted as “researchers.”

Thus, for all practical purposes, in France, Germany, Britain, and the United States, philosophy remained practicable, as before, only within the universities. However, as the universities themselves changed, the conditions for doing philosophy also changed. The idealist challenge, first issued by Kant and then taken up by Hegel, institutionalized in Jena and then in Berlin, became the model for philosophy in general. As the university remodeled itself, however, the practice of the “discipline” of philosophy changed. Like the other disciplines, it became professionalized and was subject to all the tensions that such professionalization entailed. It continued to think of itself as the central discipline in many places, and it has never quite gotten over that view of itself, even though the reality of the practice of philosophy in contemporary settings and curricular demands remains far removed from that ideal. As embodying the self-critical stance celebrated by both Kant and Hegel, however, it has always found itself somewhat in tension with its new status as professional. It also found itself in no small tension with the emerging demands to be “scientific” that gradually became louder and louder by the end of the century.

Bertrand Russell’s attempt to make philosophy into a true foundational “science,” standing more on a continuum with the mathematical and natural sciences and to eschew what he saw as the “quackery” of the British Hegelians; Husserl’s own attempt to start all over again and establish phenomenology as the foundational science of consciousness; and Heidegger’s rejection of the whole “scientistic” approach to philosophy – all had roots in the dramatic changes in the conditions in which philosophy was practiced in the nineteenth century. Philosophy as it is done now still operates in the enormous shadow cast by Jena and Berlin in the nineteenth century.

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# THE UNITY OF REASON AND THE DIVERSITY OF LIFE: THE IDEA OF A SYSTEM IN KANT AND IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking features of “continental” philosophy, and especially of the theories arising from German-speaking philosophy in the late eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century, consists in the fact that the concept of a ‘system’ plays a prominent role as a criterion for evaluating them. In almost no other age or context have the ideas of systematicity, systematic wholeness, and the form of a system been so bound up with the concept of philosophy itself. And this is true not only regarding positive evaluations but also negative ones. For some philosophers in this time the fulfillment of the criterion of systematicity was a direct and necessary condition for redeeming the claim to have provided a philosophical theory about something. Others, however, have seen the form of a system as an obstacle to any philosophical theory’s offering us any illuminating results whatever regarding any object at all.

That such controversial assessments could have arisen at all shows clearly all by itself that in this period there was a determinate spectrum of expectations regarding resorting to the concept of a system. This spectrum cannot be adequately accounted for if one is content to assume that the concept of a system, as in the eighteenth century Wolffian tradition, stands only for the idea of a certain methodical ordering of sentences (judgments, propositions) – thus for something like “being a science” (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*). In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the idea of a science was, to be sure, bound up with

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that of a system but did not exhaust it. We can see this if we attend to the fact that on the basis of a description of the interest in systematicity that relies on the concept of being scientific we cannot make sense of the fact that a conception of philosophy that does without the claim to systematicity does not automatically give up the claim to being scientific; nor on this basis can we understand how in this period the suspicion of systematicity could have arisen at all. In other words, we cannot in this way understand how a philosophy that is “only” scientific can be presented as a serious *philosophical* undertaking without making any claim to be systematic.

Thus we might conjecture that the discussions about the value for philosophy of a system of thinking rests on a conception of a “system” that is not determined merely by the methodological connotations of the term. Rather, considerations appear to have played a role relating to substantial conceptions of the task and goal of a philosophical theory. The controversy over whether philosophy is possible only as a system is hardly intelligible without this substantive background. This leads naturally to the question: What function could the conception of a system have had in philosophical discussions of the time? More precisely, it poses two questions: What is meant in general by the demand for a system? And why should the fulfillment of this demand (or the failure to fulfill it) be of such decisive significance for the success of a *philosophical* theory?

## SYSTEM AS A PROMISE AND A PROBLEM

### *Kant*

Like so much else in the history of philosophy in the nineteenth century, the question of the role of system for the possibility of philosophy is bound up with the name and the work of Immanuel Kant. Kant himself at no time doubted that philosophy is possible only as a system. On the contrary, he was firmly convinced on various grounds that the systematic form, or the form of the system, belongs essentially to philosophy. If nevertheless the question about the form of a system could have become a problem with reference to his reflections, that is because the grounds that he adduced for this conviction also provided the occasion for misgivings about it. Two of these grounds are particularly worthy of mention here. The first has little to do with the end of philosophy itself, but invokes a condition that must be fulfilled if one wants to consider philosophy as a science. For Kant, namely, it always counted as something already established that “systematic unity is that which first makes ordinary cognition into

science, i.e. makes a system out of a mere aggregate of it.”<sup>1</sup> If philosophy therefore is to be able to assert itself as a science and is not to be grasped only as a mere “rhapsody”<sup>2</sup> of cognitions, then it needs to take the form of a system.

Kant comes to this conclusion on the basis of his conception of what a system is. The pertinent formulation here is “I understand by a system, however, the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea. This is the rational concept of the form of a whole, insofar as through this the domain of the manifold as well as the position of the parts with respect to each other is determined *a priori*.”<sup>3</sup> Such a rational concept of the form of a whole, however, is given only if we have before us a principle of order legitimated by reason itself, making possible the “rational connection of cognitions into one whole.”<sup>4</sup> If one follows this description, then the demand for a system, for philosophy as for all other sciences, is valid because only the form of the system preserves the necessary unity of a domain of knowledge, and that means permitting us to specify a determinate realm of objects, as well as to characterize the logical and argumentative (deductive or inductive) relations between the claims to knowledge referring to that same realm of objects. Yet this rather abstract or formal grounding of the demand for systematic form is by no means immediately illuminating and may also have its own problems, even if it was not those problems that turned the concept of a system into an object of philosophical controversy.

This leads to the second ground that Kant provides regarding the necessity for philosophy of the form of a system. This ground has a strong component relating to content to the extent that it introduces the notion of systematic unity as a necessary idea of reason. Since it is working with assumptions that arise from the specifically Kantian project of a so-called transcendental philosophy, we must go into this briefly. Kant’s project is essentially motivated by the question how we can explain the possibility of a determinate species of cognitive judgments,<sup>5</sup> so-called *a priori* judgments, that is, those independent of experience – a species of judgments that, according to Kant, are in fact exemplified in the case of mathematics and in parts of physics, as well as allegedly also in metaphysical judgments about the soul, the world, and God. Now Kant

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [henceforth Kant, KrV], A832/B860.

<sup>2</sup> Kant, KrV A832/B860.

<sup>3</sup> Kant, KrV A832/B860.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [henceforth Kant, Ak], 4:467.

<sup>5</sup> Kant recognizes two species of *a priori* cognitive judgments, namely, synthetic and analytic. Of both species of judgment it is supposed to hold that they are universally valid and necessary. He held, however, that only synthetic *a priori* judgments are interesting and in need of explanation.



identifies (pure) reason as the faculty “that provides the principles of cognition *a priori*”<sup>6</sup> and determines the problem of transcendental philosophy as that of establishing “the system of all principles of pure reason.”<sup>7</sup> Since this problem can be taken on with a prospect of success only when one has produced a well-grounded and complete picture of the ways reason can properly function, what is required first is “a science of the mere estimation of pure reason, its sources and boundaries.”<sup>8</sup> This science Kant calls the “critique of pure reason.”

The analysis of the faculty of reason presented by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* has as one of its results that it is the special and proper task of reason not only – in its function as understanding – to put forward the principles that make *a priori* cognitions possible, but also apart from this to operate with the presupposition of a particular idea of systematic unity. This idea is “that of the form of a whole of cognition.” Through it, a complete unity of all cognitions is postulated, “through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws.”<sup>9</sup> Kant describes the same state of affairs when he says in another passage, “The unity of reason is the unity of a system,”<sup>10</sup> a formulation that he occasionally abbreviates to the dictum “Our reason (subjectively) itself is a system.”<sup>11</sup> This representation of unity dwelling in the concept of reason itself leads him to the conclusion that the characteristic function of reason in the process of acquiring cognition consists in bringing about systematic unity. Yet if the demand for systematic unity is grounded in the constitution of reason itself, and indeed directly defines the authentic use of reason, and if this demand can be met only through the presentation of cognitions in the form of a system, then philosophy, insofar as it makes a claim to cognition through reason, is necessarily bound to a systematic form.

This second ground for the necessity for philosophy of the form of a system can, to be sure, be applied from various sides against Kant himself, and it lays a

<sup>6</sup> Kant, KrV B24.

<sup>7</sup> Kant, KrV B27.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, KrV B25.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, KrV A645/B673. Kant also calls this idea of unity “unity of reason” (e.g., KrV A654/B673), or “unity of the concept of reason” (KrV A680/B708), or “rational concept of unity” (KrV A832/B860). As to the introduction of this idea of reason and for the use that Kant makes of it in connection with his doctrine of the purpose of the transcendental ideas of ‘soul’, ‘world’, and ‘God’, cf. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Bausteine kritischer Philosophie: Arbeiten zu Kant* (Bodenheim: Philo-Verlag, 1997), 109ff. As to the role this idea plays in Kant’s later philosophy in the context of his theory of empirical sciences, cf. Dina Emundts, *Kants Übergangskonzeption im Opus postumum: Zur Rolle des Nachlasswerkes für die Grundlegung der empirischen Physik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Kant, KrV A680/B708.

<sup>11</sup> Kant, KrV A738–739/B765–766.

heavy burden on the Kantian undertaking itself to the extent that it is supposed to present a rational cognition of the principles of reason, that is, a system. Let us refer to two of the more effective points of attack. From the one side, the following consideration can be pressed: even if one shares the Kantian assumption that it is a command of the function of unity of reason that leads to the necessity of the systematic realization of this unity in the form of a system, the Kantian version of transcendental philosophy comes to ruin. For Kant did not succeed *de facto* in providing a system, or even the plan for a system of all principles of reason.<sup>12</sup> This species of criticism thus moves within the framework of Kantian standards and recognizes them as justified. It disputes only whether in working out his philosophy Kant succeeded in justifying his claim to systematicity by his own standards. From another side it can be objected to Kant's reasoning that the concept of rational unity on which it is based remains merely an arbitrary assumption even if in fact he succeeded in providing a system of principles of reason. For through the successful realization of such a system it would at most be shown that the representation of rational unity is a sufficient condition for the possibility of a system, but by no means that it is a necessary condition. It might be valid 'If rational unity, then system', but this does not mean that the converse is also valid: 'If system, then rational unity'. Hence success in setting up a system does not in fact suffice to guarantee a justification of the assumption of rational unity.<sup>13</sup> Without this guarantee a compelling ground for the form of a system in philosophy is lacking. But this means either that one can do without the form of a system in philosophy – always understood as the undertaking to set up all principles of reason – or that other approaches to the grounding of the necessity of this form have to be considered. These might include those that work with the concept of rational unity that is different from Kant's, but also those that result in no claim that we have to resort to rational unity. One could say that it was the somewhat complex situation characterized by these

<sup>12</sup> Whether Kant has set up a system or only the plan for such a system was itself one of the most controversial and discussed questions already in Kant's times and with his participation. For the objection posed here, however, it is of no significance. For even the plan for a system of all principles of reason, hence the *Critique of Pure Reason*, should according to Kant be a science (cf. KrV B25). For this reason, therefore, it underlies the demand for a system.

<sup>13</sup> Kant himself seems to be an eloquent witness for this view. This is true insofar as he approves of the representation of rational unity as a rule only in the status of a regulative idea (cf. KrV A671/B699), which is indeed indispensable for hypothetical use through reason, but which may not be misinterpreted as a constitutive principle of reason: "Systematic unity (as mere idea)" – rational unity, therefore – is "only a *projected* unity, which one must regard not as given in itself, but only as a problem" (cf. KrV A647/B675). Kant is subject to the objection I have described not altogether without grounds on his side because in the end he obviously cannot do without granting to the idea of rational unity a not merely regulative but "constitutive" status. We can see this when he repeatedly asserts that "we simply have to presuppose the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary" (cf., e.g., KrV A651/B679).

two species of objection that contributed decisively to the controversy over the systematic character of philosophy in the post-Kantian discussion in the early nineteenth century, and that also influenced the later nineteenth century.

We must regard as the common point of departure for all these discussions the conviction that Kant did not in every respect succeed in realizing his so-called critical version of transcendental philosophy in accordance with his own systematic claims. This conviction is attested by several indications that in fact pertain to the essential traits of Kantian philosophy. Above all, the so-called dualisms with which Kant works, in his theory of cognition as well as his theory of morals, became the object of critical attention. Kant's undertaking as a critique of reason is characterized, namely, by the thesis that for the explanation of the fact of cognition independent of experience (as given in mathematics and parts of physics) and of morally responsible action, we have to rely on descriptions that not only operate with very heterogeneous elements, but oblige us to assume two worlds that are properly distinct and based on laws that are independent of each other. 'Heterogeneity of the elements' here means at first only that these elements are of a kind that they can be reduced neither one to the other nor to a third instance that provides their common basis. In the case of cognition these elements are, on one hand, the faculties of the cognizing subject, which Kant calls 'sensibility' and 'understanding', and, on the other hand, the products of these faculties that he characterizes as 'intuitions' or 'concepts'. In the case of moral action, the heterogeneous elements are drives, affects, and inclinations, on the one hand, and rational ends and duties, on the other. The two worlds whose introduction Kant considers indispensable for explaining the possibility of cognition and of moral action are the world of appearance (*mundus sensibilis*), which is subject to the laws of nature, and the world of things in themselves (*mundus intelligibilis*), in which the law of freedom rules.

But to move within the confines of this framework, which Kant thinks necessary, means not only to open oneself up to an image of the world that, even if it can somehow be understood as the image of a unified world of cognition and action, still rests on the assumption of equally basic oppositions that can never be set aside – precisely those so-called dualisms of an ontological, psychological, and practical kind. The suspicion is that constitutive of Kant's undertaking are still other distinctions difficult to make plausible, as unavoidable consequences of these oppositions, distinctions that sooner have the character of unsecured postulates than that of justified principles of explanation. Belonging to these distinctions, for example, are those between concepts having objective reality and those having (only) practical reality – a distinction fundamental for Kant's moral philosophy. But to them belong also, for instance, the distinction between explanations that are objectively valid and those that are (only) subjectively valid – a distinction that is of decisive

significance for Kant's theory of the organic. Even these methodological differentiations can be interpreted as 'dualistic' because they are taken by Kant as mutually exclusive alternatives.<sup>14</sup>

The critical diagnosis of the inherent weakness in the Kantian philosophy working with the 'dualisms' objection occasioned various reactions. One of the earliest of these reactions is closely bound up with the names of Karl Leonhard Reinhold and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and their program of a 'philosophy from one principle'.<sup>15</sup> They took their point of departure from the consideration that, in the light of these dualisms, there can be no question that Kant himself had not allowed the demand for unity contained in the maxim of reason, which he had presented so convincingly, to be sufficiently applied within his own philosophy. For even if one looks away from the 'internal' dualisms, so to speak, that have already been mentioned and concedes that he succeeded in providing a theory of the theoretical use of reason that satisfies his own claims of systematicity for the purpose of explaining the possibility of cognition – a concession that many, including Reinhold and Fichte, were not ready to make – as well as a theory of the practical use of reason corresponding to these demands for the purpose of explaining the possibility of moral action, we can still complain at a much more fundamental level that Kant has not systematically connected these two fundamental species of the use of reason through exhibiting a principle that makes it intelligible how these two ways of using reason should be required by his concept of reason itself. In other words, the complaint is that Kant lacks a common principle for the theoretical and practical uses of reason that is such that it allows to bring theoretical philosophy (the domain of the theoretical use of reason) and practical philosophy (the domain of the practical use of reason) into a connection that is accounted for by reason's command to achieve systematic unity.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Compare, for instance, Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Ak 5 [henceforth Kant, KU], Introduction, sect. IX. It is self-evident that by enumerating concepts that play a role in Kant's philosophy, no informative claim about their function, significance, or importance for it is being made. Above all, there is no contention that Kant himself in fact provided a sufficient occasion for the "dualistic" interpretation of his theory that is being warned against. Here it is only a question of making evident how the "dualism"-objection came about by mentioning some of the terms in which this happened.

<sup>15</sup> Reinhold and Fichte held to this program for only a relatively short time in their philosophical careers. The following remarks thus refer to a position that occupied them only into the second half of the 1790s.

<sup>16</sup> For this terminology, cf. KU Introduction, sec. II, and in particular *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* A162, where Kant presents some reflections, of which he says: "sie veranlassen mit Recht die Erwartung, es vielleicht dereinst bis zur Einsicht der Einheit des ganzen reinen Vernunftvermögens (des theoretischen sowohl als praktischen) bringen und alles aus einem Prinzip ableiten zu können." One can easily imagine that such passages were the point of departure for such a complaint.

### Reinhold

For Reinhold – and up to a certain point Fichte followed him here – this defect in the Kantian philosophy is to be removed by supplying the missing principle of unity. This led them for a while to their versions of a ‘philosophy from one principle’, the ‘elementary philosophy’ (Reinhold) or the *Wissenschaftslehre* (Fichte).<sup>17</sup> Since both understood themselves as Kantians, they were always obliged to emphasize that their project serves only as a supplementary founding of the Kantian doctrines, chiefly by making available a principle of unity – in the form of a first principle – thus establishing for the first time its *systematic* completeness, but that in this way the contents, or the so-called results of this philosophy, are by no means put in question. The systematic “spirit” of the Kantian philosophy is supposed to be validated over against the way of presenting its contents, against the Kantian ‘letter’ (Reinhold), or Kant’s ‘intention’ over against its ‘execution’,<sup>18</sup> but the Kantian undertaking itself was not put in question.

The candidates on which Reinhold and Fichte fixed their gaze as the first principle of the systematic founding of Kantian philosophy are heavily determined by standards connected to certain views, at the time peculiar to them and in essential points differing from each other, about the formal character to be demanded of the principle best suited to the end of founding a system. These views cannot be gone into here, because they are too much bound up with particulars rooted in several presuppositions that are in the final analysis not significant for the problem of a system.<sup>19</sup> But Reinhold and Fichte were of one mind on the point that the first principle has to be presuppositionless, hence not derivable from any other proposition, and that it must express a completely transparent, self-explicating state of affairs. For Reinhold this state of affairs is the ‘fact of consciousness’, for Fichte the ‘Act’ (*Tathandlung*).

The starting point for Reinhold’s reflection on the first principle is that the concept of a representation (*Vorstellung*) may be exhibited as an unanalyzed foundation of all philosophizing. If therefore one wants to found philosophy systematically, one has to have a concept of representation that is completely determined in reference to all its essential marks. Such a concept

<sup>17</sup> Representative of a large number of pertinent texts of both authors for their program of the time, cf. K. L. Reinhold, *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* (Jena, 1791), and J. G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (Jena, 1794–5).

<sup>18</sup> J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, eds. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1962–) [henceforth Fichte, GA], I, 4:230–1.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2004), 104ff.

can “be created only out of *consciousness* – a fact which must alone *ground as such* the foundation of elementary philosophy, since on no other philosophically demonstrable proposition can this philosophy support itself without falling into circular reasoning. Through no syllogism, but merely through *reflection* on the fact of consciousness, which means: by comparison with that which goes on in consciousness, we know *that the representation in consciousness is distinguished from the subject and the object and related to both.*”<sup>20</sup> This so-called Principle of Consciousness, gained through reflection on the *fact* of consciousness, is for Reinhold not a definition of the concept of representation, but rather an assertion that is in the end unprovable, which on this account “qualifies it as the first principle of all philosophy,”<sup>21</sup> because it presents the concept of representation as immediately bound up with that of consciousness.

Reinhold sees his principle as well suited to be the foundation of a system of all philosophy, theoretical as well as practical, because in his opinion it already provides through reflection on its content the fundamental determinations of both parts of philosophy. According to Reinhold, if one must distinguish the representation from the representing subject and the represented object and relate it to both, then from the analysis of the conceptual conditions under which the relation (and the distinction) of a representation to an object is possible, there results the totality of theoretical cognition, and from the analysis of the conditions of relating a representation to the subject the totality of practical cognition – both, however, succeed as a system only on the basis of a theory of representation presupposed by them, their forms and species. A system of philosophy realizing the Kantian claim to system therefore has for Reinhold the following outline: “The mere representation, the genus with its species, is the object of elementary philosophy; the representation related to the object, the genus with its species, is the object of theoretical philosophy, and the representation related merely to the subject, the genus with its species, is the object of practical philosophy.”<sup>22</sup>

### Fichte

It cannot be said that Reinhold’s attempt, with the help of the ‘principle of consciousness’ privileging his concept of representation, to overcome the problem of a system conjectured by Kant, was a great philosophical success.

<sup>20</sup> Reinhold, *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens*, 77–80.

<sup>21</sup> Reinhold, *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens*, 77–80.

<sup>22</sup> K. L. Reinhold, “Über die Möglichkeit der Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft,” in *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen: Erster Band das Fundament der Elementarphilosophie betreffend* (Jena, 1790), 364.

On the contrary, the extremely critical assessment of the Reinholdian suggestion, above all by G. E. Schulze<sup>23</sup> and S. Maimon,<sup>24</sup> quickly made it appear as one of the least interesting theoretical dead ends, so that even Reinhold later did not devote much attention to it. Nevertheless, Reinhold's insistence on a first principle was at first taken quite seriously, above all by Fichte. For Fichte, too, it was taken as established that every system needs a supreme first principle, which, however, if it is to ground a unified system of the whole of the use of reason, must not refer to a fact à la Reinhold. This, following Fichte, is so because reference to a fact leads immediately to problems that give rise to the possibility of skeptical objections against a supreme principle. The reasons why the skepticism-discussions were included in the question about the first principle cannot interest us here.<sup>25</sup> They are connected with reflections concerning the degree and kind of certainty that must be ascribed to the first principle. Instead of a 'fact' (*Tatsache*), according to Fichte, the first principle founding the system must express a so-called Act (*Tathandlung*). This should be an act whose realization constitutes the conditions under which there arises for a subject a world distinct from it as an object of cognition and action. Fichte describes this act as that of the self-generation of the I, whose realization is the necessary and also the sufficient condition for every way of relating to the I and to the world. A much-cited early formulation of his first principle therefore is "The I posits originally, absolutely, its own being."<sup>26</sup> According to Fichte, this principle, appropriately interpreted, leads to the propositions "The I posits the not-I as limited by the I" and "The I posits itself as limited through the not-I."<sup>27</sup> The first proposition serves as the foundation of practical philosophy, and the second of theoretical philosophy, and to that extent guarantees the systematic unity of the whole of philosophy.

For Fichte, in beginning with an Act, the issue was also – though perhaps not only this – the possibility of the systematic unity of philosophy understood in the Kantian sense as a theory of rational cognition. This is shown more clearly than in the *Doctrine of Science* in those texts where he refers to a Kantianizing 'reason'-terminology in order to elucidate the peculiar achievement of his

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (1792).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "Maimon's Criticism of Reinhold's 'Satz des Bewusstseins,'" in *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*, ed. L. W. Beck (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1972), 330–9.

<sup>25</sup> On this see Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. K. Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117–40.

<sup>26</sup> Fichte, GA I, 2:261.

<sup>27</sup> Fichte, GA I, 2:285.

procedure. This can be illustrated by a (here somewhat abbreviated) passage from the *System of Ethics* (1798). There, after the identity of what he calls “I” and reason is confirmed almost on the first page of this work, Fichte says: “Reason determines its action through itself. . . . This proposition has a double significance, since the action of reason is regarded from two sides,” namely, either from the practical, where ‘action’ signifies something like ‘activity in the consciousness of freedom’, or from the theoretical, where ‘action’ is taken as ‘activity in the connection of representations’.

The law which reason gives itself for the former [action], the moral law, is not necessarily followed by [reason] itself, because it is directed towards freedom, but that law which it gives itself for the latter, the law of thought, is necessarily followed because intelligence in applying it, although active, is not freely active. The whole system of reason, accordingly, . . . is determined beforehand as necessary by reason itself. . . . Reason necessarily cognizes itself completely, and an analysis of its entire procedure, or a system of reason, is possible. – Thus everything in our theory operates together (*greift . . . ineinander*). . . . Either philosophy must give up or the absolute autonomy of reason must be admitted. Only under this presupposition is the concept of a philosophy rational.<sup>28</sup>

Just like Reinhold, Fichte did not for very long pursue the experiment of founding a system oriented toward Kantian pretensions on one first principle. This is probably not because he came to doubt the necessity of the systematic form for philosophy, but rather because the demands that a first principle had to satisfy in order to perform their system-founding function (as, for example, being presuppositionless and immediately evident) were too hard to meet. Later he attempted numerous, though never published, approaches to achieve the sought after founding of a system through the analysis of the conditions of action that have to be ascribed to reason if it is to be understood as the faculty whose activity constitutes for us a unified world and, to that extent, makes possible a unified image of the world.<sup>29</sup>

### Hegel

Yet it was not only the problems connected with the formulation of a first principle that made this option of an ‘improvement’ on the Kantian philosophy seem unpromising. In addition, there was the conviction, above all expressed often by G. W. F. Hegel in his early Jena years, that recourse to a first principle in the form considered by Reinhold and Fichte also represents initially no

<sup>28</sup> Fichte, GA I, 5:68–69.

<sup>29</sup> For these later attempts, cf. Ulrich Schlösser, *Das Erfassen des Einleuchtens: Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre von 1804* (Berlin: Philo-Verlag, 2001).



real strategy for the systematic founding of philosophy because both of them remain committed to an extreme conception of objectivity dependent on the subject that had already burdened Kantian philosophy.<sup>30</sup> For Hegel, the situation presented itself roughly as follows: Reinhold's and Fichte's attempts to justify the systematic form of rational cognition might very well be regarded as well grounded and meritorious *within the framework of Kantian pretensions*, because they face the task, presumably neglected by Kant, of working out a unified concept of reason, in which reason is ascribed the role of constituting the unity of reality or actuality. To that extent, they in fact succeeded not only in overcoming the Kantian dualism of theoretical and practical reason, but also in freeing Kant's representation of the systematic unity of reason from the status of a merely regulative idea and converting it into a constitutive principle. But their attempts were unsuitable for establishing the foundations for a system of philosophy. This is not only because the program of a first principle already comes to grief on problems with the formulation of a principle. By far the more important difficulty for their positions in Hegel's view lay in the fact that they are committed to limitations bound up with the Kantian conception of objectivity. For according to their conception, objectivity must be taken as the productive achievement of the cognizing and acting subject. This not only had the consequence that one is confronted with all kinds of absurdities and difficulties that the Kantian doctrine of the thing-in-itself brought with it.<sup>31</sup> In addition, it throws a characteristic light on the one-sidedness of its concept of reason, a one-sidedness that, in Hegel's opinion, had been inherited from Kant.

For this critical assessment of the understanding of objectivity established by Kant, the following consideration was decisive for Hegel: if one asserts, as Kant did, the unknowability of the world as it is in itself, and if one, as Kant also did, allows reason a central role in the cognition of the world that is possible for us, then one must have a conception of reason that regards it as a subjective faculty for which there is posited a boundary for the realm of 'true', 'real', or 'in itself existing' objectivity that is somehow impossible to overcome. Kant's

<sup>30</sup> These considerations, presented in outline, are especially clear in the early critical writings of Hegel, above all in *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801) and in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802).

<sup>31</sup> Briefly expressed, the kernel of the problem bound up with the assumption of things in themselves consists in the fact that it cannot be made plausible how the thought of a world of objects independent of us, to which we relate as cognizing and acting, can be preserved if we have to consider this world as the product of our own activity. The solution suggested by Kant was the thought that we should admit a world radically separated from our clutches but at the same time completely inaccessible epistemically and declare it to be a world of "things in themselves" from which we have to distinguish the world of "appearances" that is accessible to us. This solution could as a rule find little conviction chiefly because of the danger presumably bound up with this suggestion that we have to assert the unknowability of the world as it really is.

suggestion thus contains the conviction that – formulated in Hegel’s earlier terminology – subject and object are absolutely separate. According to Hegel, this signifies that if Kantian philosophy talks about objectivity, all that can be meant is only a kind of objectivity that is essentially subject-dependent and thus falsified or abbreviated. Since Reinhold and especially Fichte take over the Kantian concept of reason unreflectively and ground their attempts at a systematic founding of the Kantian philosophy on it, they also cannot escape its understanding of objectivity, and so they also do not know how to begin with a reality that is subject-independent and yet accessible to reason. But this also has negative consequences for the claim to objectivity made by a philosophical system.<sup>32</sup>

This Hegelian diagnosis, going by way of the concept of objectivity, of the failure of the procedure chosen by Reinhold and Fichte for meeting the Kantian demand for a system, has two important consequences for his own approach. The first consists in the insight that an attempt that proceeds purely immanently to establish the Kantian claim to a system in Kant’s spirit has little promise: within the framework of Kant’s own requirements one cannot bring his dualisms and his limited conception of objectivity into agreement with the demands that he himself has made through the concept of rational unity in a system. With Kantian means, one cannot realize systematic unity, even if one spells them out in a way oriented to Reinhold and Fichte. The second consequence comes down to the conviction that one has to determine the Kantian concept of reason otherwise, if one wants, on the one hand, to hold onto the idea of rational unity – which Hegel always intends – and, on the other hand, to avoid a conception of reason that carries with it, in Hegel’s eyes, an all-too-one-sided fixation on it as on a subjective faculty.

Hegel chooses a very radical solution, in order to take account of these two, for him very serious, convictions: expressed in his terminology, he makes reason into the ‘absolute’; that is, he identifies reason with the entirety of reality or actuality, by declaring it – again, in his language – to be the ‘identity of subject and object’.<sup>33</sup> The expression that is best known and that occasioned many misunderstandings, not wholly unjustified ones at that, of this, his peculiar interpretation of reason, is found in the lapidary dictum from the preface of his *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (1821), where he declares that reason is actual

<sup>32</sup> In connection with Fichte’s theory, in order to indicate this deficiency, Hegel chooses the image of the indeterminate check or obstacle (*Anstoss*), through which the I as intelligence, i.e., theoretical reason, is conditioned.

<sup>33</sup> This Hegelian solution was not entirely without its precursors. Above all, F. W. J. Schelling had considered a similarly “holistic” concept of reason up until his writings on the philosophy of identity at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Cf. especially his most influential work, *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1801).

and the actual is rational. From Hegel's standpoint, this solution has something very tempting about it, since it permits a justification, although an un-Kantian one, of the representation of philosophy as a system of rational cognition proclaimed by Kant, in a way that is (allegedly) immune to the Kantian deficiencies. If, that is, reason is distinguished by the idea of systematic unity, and if it is at the same time all reality, then, if philosophy is rational cognition, it can comprehend actuality only as a systematically ordered whole. This leads, apparently seamlessly, to the formula, used often by Hegel above all in his early years, where it occurs often, that 'speculatively' understood, philosophy correctly is the "*self-cognition of reason*."<sup>34</sup>

This short summary of the strategy pursued by Hegel in bringing Kant, so to speak, onto the right path also shows very clearly that Hegel has to combine what he calls "the principle of speculation,"<sup>35</sup> namely, his conception of reason as the identity of subject and object, with two different meanings, one ontological the other epistemological. Both together already contain everything of philosophical significance for Hegel in the context discussed here. The ontological interpretation of the principle, against the background of Hegel's project of a new version of the concept of reason, results in a constitutive assumption that says in effect that the entirety of actuality, the world in all its various forms and ways of appearing, is to be taken up as a 'living totality'. Against this background the talk about the identity of subject and object points to the unified character of actuality in the sense that it is to be considered as a whole, internally differentiated but otherwise all-encompassing and identical with itself; in relation to actuality conceived as this whole the subject-object distinction has an only relative value, because it is neutral over against this distinction, since it can be described as subject just as well as object. The principle of speculation, that is, the identity of subject and object understood in the ontological sense, is among other things to say that one has to take the entirety of reality as an undivided unity of subject and object that first makes possible the subject-object distinction. This unity, Hegel in his terminology sometimes calls simply 'subject-object', sometimes characterizes as 'the absolute', and sometimes also grasps explicitly as 'reason'. When it is a matter of the ontological interpretation of the so-called principle of speculation, Hegel applies these three terms for the most part synonymously: 'subject-object', 'the absolute', and 'reason' are concepts that are simply to characterize the entirety of reality. Which term is used at a given time depends on the way in which this

<sup>34</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke: Theorieausgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970–) [henceforth Hegel, *Werke*], 2:46.

<sup>35</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 2:11.

entirety of reality is to be thematized, whether as a unity differentiated in itself ('subject-object') or as a whole ('the absolute') or as an appearing (in the sense of objectively present) actuality ('reason').<sup>36</sup>

Along with its ontological significance, the Hegelian principle of speculation has an epistemological one. If the identity of subject and object is a matter of concern in this sense, then the issue is the way in which it is to be asserted that the ontological subject-object unity must be brought to presentation 'for cognition'. For, in Hegel's words, "The absolute should be constructed for consciousness, [this] is the task of philosophy."<sup>37</sup> The way the subject-object unity for a consciousness is to be construed is, however, dependent for Hegel on the conceptual resources that the consciousness – which here in this early work he identifies with 'healthy human understanding' – has available for the conceptual presentation of this unity. The conceptual means, however, that are at the disposal of the normal, enlightened, and cultured individual of his time for the realization of this presentation, are for Hegel in principle problematic, because they are fundamentally unsuitable for this presentation. He comes to this diagnosis, critical of the time, on the ground of his assessment that his age (and not only his!) is an age of diremption (*Entzweiung*). He characterizes such an age using a formula that has become famous, as one in which "the power of unification disappears from the life of human beings, and the oppositions lose their living relation and reciprocal effect and gain independence."<sup>38</sup> The slogan in this quotation that leads further for our purposes is that of the "independence" (*Selbständigkeit*) of the opposites as an expression of diremption. This is because it is that slogan which brings one of Hegel's fundamental assumptions into play. Hegel is of the opinion, namely, that the conviction that oppositions cannot be overcome indicates a style of thinking or an attitude of consciousness that no longer stands in relation to reality as a living totality and thus is guilty of, as Hegel calls it, "having stepped away (*Herausgetretensein*) from totality."<sup>39</sup> Now if the comprehension of the true character of actuality, namely, that of being a living totality, is to be the task of philosophy, and if the 'normal' thinking cannot accomplish this with its own means, precisely on account of its fixation on the stability of opposites, then the principle of speculation is valid as a normative principle for the end of establishing cognition. In its epistemological significance, therefore, the principle of the identity

<sup>36</sup> These terminological usages are already made sufficiently clear in the first section of the introductory discussions in the *Differenz-Schrift*, namely, in the reflections on the *Historical Prospects of Philosophical Systems*.

<sup>37</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 2:25.

<sup>38</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 2:22.

<sup>39</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 2:24.

of subject and object or the thesis of the reality of reason has the function of a methodological guiding principle, with whose help the limitations or one-sidednesses of 'normal' thinking are to be overcome.<sup>40</sup>

On the basis of the 'holistic' concept of reason brought into play by Hegel, there results the form of the system for philosophy as rational cognition from the central assumption of the unity of reason. Now how, precisely, just such a system has to look, and how the form of the system has to be filled out regarding its content – this depends quite naturally on the way in which one represents reason or reality as organized. Hegel's representation is characterized through the already mentioned talk about reason as a living totality: a system of rational cognition according to him must take account of the conditions that permit reason to be comprehended as a living totality. What these conditions are can be discerned from the sole and rather sketchy execution of his system, namely, from his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, which appeared during his life in three editions (the last one in 1830), though in places they differ strongly from one another. To grasp something as a living entity means for Hegel among other things at least also to understand it as an organic unity organizing itself in such a way that it realizes the sum total of all the inherent marks that are constitutive of what Hegel calls its "concept." The concept of an organism is to that extent its still undeveloped structural plan, which contains the entirety of determinations that make the developed organism into what it characteristically is.<sup>41</sup> But to an entity that is not merely potentially present but rather actual and living, there belongs not only its concept but also the process taking place in the time of its realization toward what it properly is. This process is understood by Hegel as a teleological course of development, whose goal (*telos*) it is to actualize the concept that grounds the living entity in question.

If one applies this model to (Hegelian) reason, understood as a living totality, then two things belong to its systematic unfolding: (1) the exposition of its concept and (2) the presentation of the process of its realization. The first task is

<sup>40</sup> The ontological and epistemological aspects the early Jena Hegel combines in his "holistic" concept of reason, which are only briefly described here, are presented more completely and discussed in Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "Den Verstand zur Vernunft bringen? Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit Kant in der Differenzschrift," in *Das Interesse des Denkens – Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, eds. K. Vieweg and W. Welsch (Freiburg: Alber, 2003), 89–108.

<sup>41</sup> Hegel makes this concept of "concept" more visible by the image of an acorn, which contains in it all the determinations making up the developmental process of an oak (Hegel, *Werke* 3:19) or that of a newborn child, in which there are all the predispositions through whose realization in the course of development into an adult human being this particular human being is characterized (Hegel, *Werke* 10:33). This use of the concept of a "concept," which is typical for Hegel, makes intelligible why he always indicates that by the term "concept" he means something other than what is meant in traditional logic, which by "concept" understands merely any universal representation.

envisioned in Hegel's so-called *Science of Logic*: it is the theory of the concept of reason and represents its internal conceptual structure. Since it has the conceptual foundation, so to speak, of actuality or reality as its object, Hegel presented his 'logic' as the discipline that is to be the successor to traditional metaphysics. This 'logic' is to be distinguished from that which Hegel calls 'real-philosophy' (*Realphilosophie*), to which the second task pertains, namely, that of presenting the ways in which this concept actualizes itself first as nature and then as mental, social-political, and cultural reality. Logic and real-philosophy together constitute the whole system of reason: reason as the genuine single state of affairs has become fully transparent to itself, and since in the end it has to do only with itself, this system is only its own achievement – philosophy is thus in fact pure rational cognition.<sup>42</sup>

Even if Hegel can claim to have taken up the Kantian idea of the systematic unity of reason and made it fruitful in a certain way that is burdened with neither Kant's dualisms nor his problematic concept of objectivity, in one respect he has nevertheless not gone beyond Kant and probably did not want to go beyond him: Hegel's justification for the systematic form of philosophy proceeds from and shares the (Kantian) thesis that philosophical cognition is rational cognition. This thesis can be interpreted in various ways. On one reading it has a disciplining function and says that there are boundaries concerning what we can know, and that the realm of what we can know is only part of the realm of what we must recognize as reality, namely, just that realm that is accessible to our reason. This appears to have been the Kantian version of the thesis. On another reading, namely, the Hegelian, it says more: here it results in the assertion that everything that is is accessible to rational cognition, just because in the end reason is all of reality. But this seems to imply the conviction that everything that cannot be cognized through reason, and that means everything that cannot be integrated into a system of rational cognition, is also not real. According to this reading, philosophy – understood as systematic rational cognition – determines not only the boundaries of cognition but the boundaries of reality, of the world. The notion that such a wide-ranging assertion can be brought into connection with the assumption of a systematic unity of reason, and thereby with the idea of philosophy as a system of rational cognition, was understandably more unsettling than convincing. Above all, it posed two questions all by itself, so to speak: (1) Must one see the concept of a system in such a tight combination with the concept of reason as Kant and his idealistic

<sup>42</sup> This conception of Hegel's system, here presented in a very abbreviated way, is sketched more completely in Dina Emundts and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *G. W. F. Hegel: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2002).

followers believed? (2) Is philosophical cognition rightly limited to rational cognition, and must philosophy necessarily stand under the dictate of reason?

#### SYSTEM AS A WRONG PATH AND A DEAD END

One possibility of dealing with these two questions consists in not posing them at all. There might be various and not mutually exclusive grounds for this abstemiousness. On the one hand, one might be inclined to it because one proceeds from an understanding of system such that no role is played in it by the close connection, going back to Kant's reflections, among philosophy, reason, and system; or, on the other hand, one might decide on it because one considers the post-Kantian systems (and above all Hegel's) to be in the end misguided, and to that extent indicators that the justification of the thought of system – if, indeed, it needs any justification at all – must rest on other resources, as on a transcendent, because all-too-metaphysical, concept of reason. Whichever of these two motives might have been effective – probably a mixture of both – this possibility not to engage in the discussion of system in the tradition arising from Kant and the post-Kantian idealists was certainly perceived at the time. As proponents of this attitude, we can consider a few well-known representatives of German-speaking academic philosophy in the second third of the nineteenth century, above all J. F. Herbart and R. H. Lotze. Not that either of these authors made it his purpose to separate himself from the concept of a system or of systematic philosophy. For them, rather, both concepts were sufficiently determined by that of method or of methodical philosophizing, and to that extent it was not more problematic than the concept of method. 'System' as a theme was partitioned off in this way from the question about the possibility of philosophy as rational cognition and thus neutralized as a philosophical problem.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Both Herbart and Lotze take up again the pre-Kantian notion of a system with relatively few worries, since they see the systematic chiefly in the connection of an investigation according to grounds and consequences under the constraint of logical laws. This conception, established already by Christian Wolff (*De differentia intellectus systematici et non systematici*, 1729) is explicitly represented by Herbart, and always practiced by Lotze. Thus in his chapter "On the System of Philosophy in General" in the second edition of his work *Short Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1841), Herbart characterizes a system as a "systematic ordering of thoughts" built upon a foundation, or a "rule-guided investigation" (sec. 191), and he holds as the chief fault of false systems – of which he chooses Hegel's as his paradigm – the "one-sidedness of method" (sec. 192). The first part of Lotze's unfinished *System of Philosophy*, which appeared under the title *Logic: Three Books of Thinking, Investigating and Cognizing* (1874, 2nd ed., 1880), contains already in the foreword (to the first edition) the stipulation that for him the talk about a system has the significance only of "presenting the whole of my personal convictions in a systematic form," where the context makes it clear that by "systematic form" something like "consistent connection" is meant. It has to be

The philosophically more fruitful line of reasoning about the role of the system in philosophy was, however, carried on by those who did permit themselves to ask the questions mentioned previously and took a critical stance toward the relation of philosophy, reason, and system as conceived by Kant and the post-Kantian idealists. They were, above all, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Proceeding from different starting points, all of them put in question the extreme reason-centeredness of philosophy bound up with the idealistic models and the privileging of the form of the system that goes with it.

### Jacobi

For Jacobi, the Kantian philosophy already by itself shows that the attempt to attain to an adequate and comprehensive philosophical and thus systematically justified cognition of reality, using exclusively the means of reason as Kant conceived it, leads not only to implausible results, but even to pernicious ones. Even before the post-Kantian philosophers presented their various projects to an interested public, he carried out, in influential and well-known writings, a very polemical campaign against the notion that one can come to an adequate understanding of the world and the human situation through “demonstrative explaining.” Although his objections are directed primarily against Spinoza and Kant, the aim of his misgivings went much further: they wanted to discredit a whole type of philosophy, namely, that which proceeds unquestioningly from a rational disclosure of the world.<sup>44</sup>

The list of complaints Jacobi makes against Kantian philosophy is astonishingly long and covers a wide spectrum of Kantian themes. Presented in a few words, the chief ones are

noted, however, that Lotze’s lack of interest in a more “demanding” concept of a system does not go along with a critique of Hegel. On the contrary, he considers his own work as obligated to what he thinks Hegel was after, i.e., “to understand the course of the world and not merely to reckon it up” (608), and he also can attach good sense to some of the more extravagant means that, in his opinion, are brought into play by Hegel, such as a so-called form of speculative intuition (608) – whatever that might be.

<sup>44</sup> In the present connection, two relatively early and also very well-known writings of Jacobi are of greatest significance. These are (1) *On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn* (first published in 1785), which led to the so-called pantheism controversy and then appeared in a second edition, expanded through several supplements in 1789, and (2) *David Hume on Belief, or Idealism and Realism* (1787), to which was added as a very critical supplement a highly critical treatise about Kant, under the title *On Transcendental Idealism*. It is well attested that these two writings played an important role for all the post-Kantian idealist thinkers. Jacobi was, however, not only a critic of Kant. In later publications he argued just as critically with Fichte’s and Schelling’s positions.



1. against Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves, as well as the vulnerability of the Kantian theory of knowledge to skeptical objections;
2. against the 'quantity-fetishism' allegedly bound up with Kant's theory of the natural sciences, which prevents Kant from taking adequate account of the ways natural organic life appears; and
3. against Kant's theory of the I, which, according to Jacobi, reduces the conscious living individual to a mere function of logical unity.

These complaints culminate in a reservation that is, so to speak, metaphilosophical, criticizing, on the one hand, the concept of rationality favored by Kant and questioning the way it privileges the laws of logic in the process of epistemic justification, and, on the other hand, doubting the possibility of being able in fact to arrive at cognitions that suitably disclose our world using a Kantian concept of philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

All these objections are for Jacobi not only significant as objections against the content of central doctrines of the Kantian philosophy. They simultaneously have the function of pointing to deficiencies in an understanding of philosophy that is dependent on the modern concept of science, as it has been established mainly by Newtonian physics. These deficiencies are chiefly connected with the standard of rationality presupposed by a philosophy that relies unreflectively on the paradigm of the natural sciences and also determines Kant's concept of reason. This standard of rationality may be characterized by several convictions that are both ungrounded and also restrictive regarding what they permit to count as reality. Two of these convictions are especially offensive:

1. The notion that the general laws of logic present us with, as Kant puts it, an at least negative criterion of truth and
2. The methodological maxim that only that which lets itself be explained by means of a proof or a demonstration can be an object of our cognition.

Both convictions are not only connected in Jacobi's eyes by the fact that the general laws of logic commit the causal-mechanistic model of explanation for natural phenomena and events (which was favored by Kant on epistemological grounds) to the form of deduction or the syllogism. Above all, they are also thereby bound to limit the realm of what is real to the realm of what is accessible to logical deduction and to demonstrative (causal-mechanistic) explanation. Since Jacobi regards these limitations as restrictions that according to Kant reason lays *on itself*, this concept of reason is misguided and a permanent

<sup>45</sup> For a more extensive discussion of these objections, as well as the consequences Jacobi draws from them, which are presented later in an abbreviated fashion, cf. Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 53ff.

stumbling block: not only does it deny the possibility of the objective reality of the supernatural and the unconditioned, but it also declares (objectively) unreal much of that of whose (objective) reality we are firmly convinced, as for example the (objective) reality of freedom and the (objective) reality of living organisms, hence of all sorts of things that resist every causal-mechanistic explanation. If Jacobi in this connection denounces the ‘spirit of the syllogism’<sup>46</sup> and calls upon us not to identify the boundaries of reality with those of demonstrative explanation, he is chiefly criticizing the restrictive conception of reality that unavoidably corresponds to the concept of reason that this spirit has made dominant. It is this context that the late Jacobi has before his eyes when he raises the explosive objection against Kant’s theoretical philosophy that it leads to nihilism, “and indeed with such an all-destroying power that afterward no help we can imagine could bring back what has been lost once and for all.”<sup>47</sup> Philosophy as a system of rational cognition, the Kantian dream of an ordered whole of secure knowledge, if knowledge is limited to the realm of experience, stands revealed, according to Jacobi, as the nightmare of a world limited to what is dead, mechanical, and finite, in which we have to regiment ourselves under the dictatorship of an autonomous reason and its cognitive possibilities. This price, which Kant is prepared to pay for the liberation from self-incurred minority (*Unmündigkeit*) that he hopes for, is for Jacobi too high, not only because the world is different – richer and more alive – but also above all because it binds us to nihilism, egoism – Jacobi’s favorite term for Kant’s transcendental idealism – and atheism, in other words, to attitudes that deprive life of its meaning.

Jacobi’s own position can be described as one that is characterized by the radical sacrifice of those premises he attributes to the Kantian philosophy and that proceeds from an allegedly less restrictive concept of knowledge or cognition than the Kantian one. He himself gives the best summary of his philosophical intentions when, at the end of his life, he looks back at his Spinoza-book and writes: “The assertion made in this work ‘All human cognition proceeds from revelation and faith,’ has excited general resentment in the German philosophical world. It was pretended not to be clear that there is first-hand knowledge that conditions all second-hand knowledge (science). A knowledge *without proofs*, which necessarily precedes knowledge *from proofs*, which grounds it, and incessantly and totally rules over it.”<sup>48</sup> These assertions receive their

<sup>46</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, eds. Friedrich Roth and Friedrich Köppen, 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1812–25; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), [henceforth Jacobi, *Werke*], 4:1, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Jacobi, *Werke* 2:19.

<sup>48</sup> Jacobi, *Werke* 2:2–3. This dictum takes up directly a movingly written confession from the Spinoza-letters. There it was said: “Dear Mendelssohn, we are all born in faith, and must remain

justification, as Jacobi thinks, through their immediately evident plausibility, which provides the occasion for the positive cognition that we have to support our fundamental convictions on faith and revelation. Even the assumption of the validity of the causal principle is based on faith, namely, on faith in the reality of the unconditioned and the supernatural. This is evidenced, according to Jacobi, by the following consideration: if, on the one hand, it necessarily belongs to the concept of causality that there is for every conditioned thing (at least) a condition that precedes it in time, and if, however, on the other hand, this concept of causality makes impossible the representation of the beginning of a causal chain whose first member is unconditioned, then this means only that this concept of causality is insufficient to make its own application intelligible.<sup>49</sup> This implies that the mere possibility that the causal principle is valid presupposes the representation of the reality of something that is not itself subjected to this principle, namely, something unconditioned. Since, however, every “explaining by proof through grounds” presupposes the validity and applicability of this principle of causality, the representation of the reality of the unconditioned is both a presupposition of the possibility of the causal principle and also not intelligible through this principle. Thus we are referred once again to faith – in this case, faith in the reality of the unconditioned – if we want to understand even the possibility that the causal principle is valid. Thus, according to Jacobi, if one identifies nature with that which is subject to the causal principle, grasping it as the “sum-total of what is conditioned,” then that which makes possible nature as this sum-total must not itself be nature, but rather something supernatural. Hence Jacobi summarizes his chief thought in this matter thus: “Now, since the unconditioned lies outside nature, and outside every natural connection with it, nature, however, is the sum-total of the conditioned, which is nevertheless grounded in the unconditioned and consequently conjoined with it, therefore this unconditioned is called the *supernatural*, and cannot be called anything else. It is from this supernatural, then, that the natural, or the world-whole must originate, and must have originated, and in a supernatural way.”<sup>50</sup>

in faith, Just as we are all born in society and must remain in society. How can we strive for certainty when certainty is not previously familiar to us? And how can it be familiar to us, except through something that we already know with certainty? This leads to the concept of an immediate certainty that needs no proofs, but rather absolutely excludes all proofs, and is a representation that singly and alone is in agreement with the represented things (hence has its ground in itself). The conviction through proofs is a certainty at second hand, resting on comparison, and it can never be secure and perfect. Now if every assent that does not arise from rational grounds is faith, then the conviction of rational grounds themselves must come from faith, and receive its strength from this alone” (Jacobi, Werke 4:1, 210ff.).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Jacobi, Werke 2:80.

<sup>50</sup> Jacobi, Werke 4:2, 155.

Seen in its entirety, Jacobi's positive mission leads to an antirationalistic position with the following content: revelation and faith are the final sources of all knowledge and cognition. It is they that afford us access to what necessarily grounds the demonstrable knowledge accessible through syllogisms. This grounding itself cannot be made accessible through logical demonstrations. It is the unconditioned or the supernatural that – because it is indemonstrable – remains closed off in principle to the (Kantian) reason that is fixated on logic and system. A philosophy that despises this insight and thinks it can put itself, through fetishizing the causal principle and the laws of logic, in a position where it may set the boundaries of reality equal to the boundaries of what is cognizable according to this principle and these laws, such a philosophy overlooks two states of affairs that reciprocally elucidate each other. (1) The explaining that builds on logic and the causal principle leads to irresolvable absurdities and (2) “thus the path to cognition is a mysterious path – not a syllogistic one or a mechanical one.”<sup>51</sup> What all this means for the practice of philosophy Jacobi brought into an influential formula: “According to my judgment, the greatest merit of the investigator is to disclose existence and to reveal it. . . . Explanation is for him a means, a path to the goal, a proximate, never an ultimate end. His ultimate end is what cannot be explained: the irresolvable, the immediate, the simple.”<sup>52</sup> It is self-evident that in such a concept of philosophy the Kantian concept of reason as systematic unity can play no role, because in it the concept of reason itself is not a concept that enlightens but a concept that gets in the way.

### Kierkegaard

If for Jacobi it is the Kantian philosophy that serves as the paradigmatic documentation that any undertaking that tries to come to an adequate cognition of the world by means of reason alone is condemned to failure, then for Kierkegaard it is Hegel's philosophy that shows in a paradigmatic way the limits of a reason-centered understanding of philosophy.<sup>53</sup> Similarly to Jacobi, to

<sup>51</sup> Jacobi, *Werke* 4:1, 249.

<sup>52</sup> Jacobi, *Werke* 4:1, 72.

<sup>53</sup> The most important writings of Kierkegaard for our discussion here are his two treatises *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy* by Johannes Climacus (1844), eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); *Søren Kierkegaards skrifter*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. (Copenhagen: Gad, 1997) [henceforth Kierkegaard SK], IV; and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments, Mimic-pathetic-dialectic Compilation: An Existential Contribution by Johannes Climacus* (1846), eds. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), Kierkegaard, Sk VII.

whom he quite frequently refers explicitly and implicitly,<sup>54</sup> Kierkegaard, too, sees the chief defect of a philosophy that has been forced into a system through any sort of alleged compulsion of reason as lying in the fact that it is in the end not in a position to give an adequate account of the fundamental truths of life and the convictions that support them. For Kierkegaard these truths are above all those of (Christian) faith, which in his view require appropriation by human beings, which can never be accomplished by a philosophy based on a faith in reason. As to the theme of truths of faith understood theologically, we can summarize as follows the basic traits of one strand of his reflections in roughly this way: the phenomenal kernel of (Christian) faith consists in the conviction that there is a God or that God exists. This conviction is peculiar in that for rational thinking it not only cannot be grounded but even must be without a ground if it is to be a 'lived', 'effective' conviction and not merely an intellectual one. If the understanding with its means tried to make the representation of God's existence accessible, then it would have to be able to prove his existence. But such a proof is impossible, based on a dilemma. On the one side, namely, it is taken for granted that in order to carry out a proof of the existence of something, one would have to presuppose it as already existing, which would make the proof superfluous. On the other side, however, it is obvious that if one proceeds from the nonexistence of that whose existence one wants to prove, one cannot prove it because its nonexistence is presupposed.<sup>55</sup> Kierkegaard sees two important consequences following from this dilemma. The first one has to do with the logical form of a proof of existence. It goes, "I never reason in conclusion to existence, but I reason in conclusion from existence."<sup>56</sup> The

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Philosophical Fragments*, 84, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 103–5, 250–1, Kierkegaard, Sk VII:82–5, 211.

<sup>55</sup> Kierkegaard describes this dilemma as follows: "It hardly occurs to the understanding to want to demonstrate that this unknown (the god) exists. If, namely, the god does not exist, then of course it is impossible to demonstrate it. But if he does exist, then it is foolishness to want to demonstrate it, since I, in the very moment the demonstration commences, would presuppose it not as doubtful (which a presupposition cannot be, inasmuch as it is a presupposition) but as decided, because otherwise I would not begin, easily perceiving that the whole thing would be impossible if he did not exist. If, however, I interpret the expression "to demonstrate the existence of the god," to mean that I want to demonstrate that the unknown, which exists, is the god, then I do not express myself very felicitously, for then I demonstrate nothing, least of all an existence, but I develop the definition of my concept. Die ganze Beweisführung wird ständig etwas ganz anderes, wird eine mehr äußerliche Schlussfolgerung aus dem, – wird was ich schliesse aus dem – dass ich angenommen habe, dass das in Frage Stehende da ist" (*Philosophical Fragments*, 39–40, Kierkegaard, Sk IV:207).

<sup>56</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 40, Kierkegaard, Sk IV:207. The German translator of the *Philosophical Fragments*, E. Hirsch, refers in a note to the fact that one finds a very similar argument in a lecture-course given by Schelling in 1841–2 that Kierkegaard attended. This lecture is mentioned and quoted from by H. E. G. Paulus, *Die endlich offenbar gewordene positive Philosophie der Offenbarung* (Darmstadt, 1843), 475.

second consequence consists in denying the possibility of existence-proofs in general, which Kierkegaard states very plainly: "Whether we call existence an *accessorium* or the eternal *prius*, it is never subject to demonstration."<sup>57</sup> Doubts about God's existence can therefore never be overcome by the understanding directed to a secured system of truths, but only by a faith that has to be conceived in this connection not as a cognition but as an act of freedom, an expression of will, a decision.<sup>58</sup> It is these two consequences that lead Kierkegaard on the occasion of the phenomenon of faith to the view that for the systematizing understanding, the conviction of God's existence constituting faith must have the form of a paradox, a paradox that is an offense to the understanding that it cannot resolve through its own means.

As to the way of appropriating the truths of the Christian religion by the finite human individual, Kierkegaard is less concerned with the psychological problem of how to communicate them adequately than with the question about what character truths must have if they are to have existential significance for a subject, if they are to make a difference for the subject's life. It is in the context of elucidating this question that he settles on his real critique of systematic thinking in philosophy, for which for him Hegel's philosophy stands as the chief example and that he therefore characterizes all the way through his discussion by the term 'speculation'. One can regard as the point of departure for his reflections the distinction between a merely objective way of considering truth and one that also brings into view the acceptance and the living experience of these truths. A truth considered objectively, or an objective truth, may be taken up without personal interest, in an attitude of indifference. The same truth is considered subjectively, or is a subjective truth, if a subject "has an infinite personal interest in its relation to this truth."<sup>59</sup> Now the thesis that Kierkegaard wants to make plausible with the help of this distinction is a twofold one: first, he wants to make it plain that systematic philosophical thinking or speculation can treat the truths of the Christian faith only as objective truths and must therefore miss them; and, second, he would like to show that this speculative thinking, simply on account of its obligation to objectivity, cannot arrive at any truth at all to which the existing subject might stand in a personally interested relationship. Regarding the first part of his thesis, namely, the assertion that systematically philosophical or speculative handling of Christian truth leads to an objectivity that cannot be overcome, Kierkegaard points out, summarized very briefly, the

<sup>57</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 40, Kierkegaard, Sk IV:207.

<sup>58</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, 84, Kierkegaard Sk IV:247.

<sup>59</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 73, 197, Kierkegaard, Sk VII:55, 165.

following: speculation would like to treat all objects that it considers as truths in such a way that everything subjective, everything that has to do with personal attitudes, expectations, and interests, plays no role in its consideration. But now there are objects – and the truths of the Christian religion belong to these – that are appropriately accessible at all only through a subjective attitude, because they are “the inwardness of subjectivity itself.”<sup>60</sup> But this means nothing less than that these objects or truths cannot come into view for speculation at all. That to which speculation means to relate its cognition are not these objects – which are nothing for it – but rather some or other imagined substitutes for them.<sup>61</sup> As to the second part of his thesis, the part that asserts the impossibility of integrating subjective truths into the systematic exertions of so-called speculation, it is based on the obligation of speculation to be objective, which Kierkegaard presupposes as a general restriction. Kierkegaard’s critical message in this matter can be summarized in three propositions: on account of the obligation to be objective, which is constitutive for speculative thinking whose goal is a system, nothing that has to do with existence or with the subject is permitted in the products of such thinking, namely, in the system. This circumstance, however, makes every assertion of a system, *seen from the subject’s point of view*, into a hypothesis. But a hypothesis (seen from Kierkegaard’s standpoint) can never be a subjective truth (in the Kierkegaardian sense). Now if, like Kierkegaard, one takes the logical to be the mark of the speculative-systematic, then one can proclaim with him, “Thus (a) a logical system can be given, but (b) a system of existence cannot be given.”<sup>62</sup> The claim of speculative philosophy to integrate all truths within the framework of a system thus comes to grief on the systematic irretrievability of subjective truth and its anchoring in the inwardness of subjectivity.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 129, Kierkegaard, Sk VII:104–5.

<sup>61</sup> In the chapter “Speculative Way of Cognition” in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard gives the following description: “Like is understood by like, and the old sentence *quicquid cognoscitur per modum cognoscentis cognoscitur* [whatever is known is known in the mode of the knower] must indeed be amplified in such a way that there is also a mode in which the knower knows nothing whatever or that his knowing amounts to a delusion. With reference to a kind of observation in which it is of importance that the observer is in a definite state, it holds true that when he is not in that state he does not know anything whatever. . . . If Christianity is essentially something objective, it behooves the observer to be objective. But if Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake if the observer is objective” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 51–2, Kierkegaard, Sk VII:39–40).

<sup>62</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 109, Kierkegaard, Sk VII:88.

<sup>63</sup> The Kierkegaardian critique of systematic thinking just sketched in no way exhausts the whole spectrum of his objections against the representation of the necessarily systematic character of philosophy. At least as much as the theory of subjective truths we have placed in the foreground, it was the open questions of the beginning, the presuppositions, and the completability of systems that brought him to a critical estimation of the systematic form of philosophy.

*Nietzsche*

If Jacobi and Kierkegaard took a conception of philosophy that is limited to systematic rational knowledge to be insufficient because a philosophy with these commitments must declare important realms of (natural) reality and (cultural) life to be incomprehensible, as well as being unable to take account of fundamental subjective attitudes toward ourselves and the world, then the critique by Friedrich Nietzsche on such an understanding of philosophy is much more fundamental and hence more radical. It is based on a completely uncompromising hostility to reason, having its roots in the conviction, which determines all of his works, that reason is an instrument of falsification and coercion, which was invented only in order to assert 'the false' as 'the true'. Given this assessment, it can only be expected that Nietzsche's concept of reason, as he intends it, is just as polemical as it is undifferentiated. For him, 'reason' is essentially a term covering everything that can be brought into connection with 'normal' standards of rationality and the world-picture bound up with them. To appeal to reason, for Nietzsche, is neither more nor less than voluntarily to subject oneself to the dictatorship of a thinking that looks directly away from the 'true' constitution of reality in all the forms of its appearance and wants to force us to accept the world, against all the evidence, as a whole ordered and connected ultimately by (logical, methodological, categorical) laws of reason. According to Nietzsche, reason is nothing more than an attitude that falsifies the world, and trust in it is rather to be regarded as a moral phenomenon, and a moral problem.<sup>64</sup>

As background for this conviction a very few fundamental assumptions are offered. To them belong the 'ontological' thesis, going back more or less directly to Schopenhauer, that we have to regard the whole of reality as an unordered, chaotic dynamic process, whose course is without end, goal, or direction, even without any sense. This ultimate meaninglessness holds for all natural phenomena and processes, thus for human life as well. If the human being were to set before himself without protection a realistic insight into the meaninglessness of life, there would be no motive to go on living at all. This pessimistic

<sup>64</sup> See F. Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980) [henceforth Nietzsche, KGW], V/1:7. Nietzsche's works are just as impressive as they are hard to summarize, and this is not only because of their generally aphoristic form. In addition, the difficulty is that although it is relatively easy to get the general tendency of his critique on rational norms and conceptions of rationality, his execution of this critique in argument is extremely multilayered, rich in different facets and perspectives. This has the consequence, which is hard to avoid, that in presenting this critique one can always mention only single aspects, and one's account is compelled to be one-sided and abbreviated. In the following I limit myself to those aspects of Nietzsche's critique that bring into view his estimation of the achievements of metaphysics.



estimate leads Schopenhauer, as we know, to declare that negation of life is the only form of life that can be based on reflection. Nietzsche, who shares this 'ontological' diagnosis, nevertheless refuses to accept Schopenhauer's life-negating pessimism. He does this by complementing this borrowed 'ontological' thesis with an original 'psychological' one. It says that the human being, in order to have any ground at all to want to survive, needs something like a meaning for life, which, since it is not given along with the world, is something he must make up, simulate, or invent for himself. This happens through the creation of an arsenal of value-assertions, which permit him to interpret himself and his existence as a life led through ends and goals. Belonging to those values that the human being creates as ends whose realization provides a meaning-fiction are not only moral, religious, and aesthetic notions, but just as much, if not so primarily, certain ways of determining the genuine constitution of reality. And here it holds for Nietzsche that such determinations have the aim of denying the facts of instability and dynamism, hence that they have to deny the 'true' character of the world and establish instead a static conception of both inner and outer reality.<sup>65</sup>

Now for Nietzsche it was the task and end of philosophy in the form of traditional Western metaphysics to carry out this interpretation of reality, which he denounces as 'falsification'. It was this metaphysics, through the appeal to supposedly eternal laws of reason, that invented and enforced all the conceptions and notions that made possible the representation of an ordered, stable, and manageable world, in short, a 'meaningful' world. The most general characterization that Nietzsche uses in describing the goal of metaphysics, and to that extent also of philosophy, is that metaphysics allowed static being primacy ahead of dynamic becoming, ascribed to duration predominance over alteration, and installed the eternal as having priority over transitoriness when it comes to the values that are to have validity as the fundamental feature of reality. This privileging of being over becoming, of duration and the eternal over the transitory, is, according to Nietzsche, already established in pre-Platonic philosophy and distinguishes Western metaphysics in its entirety.<sup>66</sup> The concrete expression of the privileging by metaphysics of concepts that emphasize

<sup>65</sup> The early Nietzsche perceives art as performing the function of deceiving us about the "true" character of reality.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. B. Glatzeder, *Perspektiven der Wünschbarkeit: Nietzsches frühe Metaphysikkritik* (Berlin: Philo-Verlag, 2000). Nietzsche's idea that the essential decisions about the way the Western tradition has conceived the constitution of the world down to the present day were taken already in early Greek philosophy became in the twentieth century a central element of the thought of Martin Heidegger. While Nietzsche places the early Greeks and Socrates at the beginning of a gigantic history of deception, which has led to an illegitimate and in the end fatal dominion of reason, for Heidegger the pre-Socratic Greeks stand at the beginning of a no less problematic history of a fall, characterized by forgetfulness of being and the withdrawal from truth.

the static character of reality are for Nietzsche the so-called categories of reason, the concepts that signify for us the most fundamental states of affairs and forms of order belonging to material as well as psychical reality. An especially prominent place among these concepts belongs to those of substance, causality, the subject, and the I – they all suggest duration, regularity, and order as the proper essence of the real.

Nietzsche calls attention in a manner that is rich both in verbiage and in insight to the consequences of such metaphysical prescriptions, which for him are in the end untenable. They are not only of a philosophical kind but have to do also with every sphere of life, above all with our moral and religious attitudes. But it is not so much these consequences that he finds reprehensible, as rather the fraud that is committed in the name of reason, which in his eyes is bound up with the metaphysical undertaking. In principle, according to Nietzsche, the metaphysical constructions have their justification, because according to his ‘psychological’ thesis they are necessary in order to make possible for human beings the fiction of a stable, ordered reality and with it the assumption of a meaning to life. But these constructions have turned into a fraud through the fact that metaphysics denies their origin in the human need for meaning, and thus their normative character, and ascribes to them a descriptive status, by characterizing them not as decrees of human reason but as elements of reality. This ‘descriptive fallacy’ committed by metaphysics, giving out the normative as descriptive, is, however, a *metabasis eis allo genos* that in the end discredits reason in whose name philosophy as metaphysics claims to be acting. For Nietzsche it follows from this assessment that philosophy, as soon as it is restricted to rational cognition, is nothing more than a fraudulent enterprise, “that of misunderstanding reality in a prudent way.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Nietzsche, KGW VIII/3:129. Nietzsche’s own late presentation of this state of affairs reads as follows: “The aberration of philosophy is that, instead of seeing in logic and the categories of reason means toward the adjustment of the world for utilitarian ends (basically, toward an expedient *falsification*), one believed one possessed in them the criterion of truth and *reality*. The ‘criterion of truth’ was in fact merely the biological utility of such a system of systematic falsification, and since a species of animals knows of nothing more important than its own preservation, one might indeed be permitted to speak here of ‘truth’. The naïveté was to take an anthropocentric idiosyncrasy as the *measure of things*, as the rule for determining ‘real’ and ‘unreal’: in short, to make absolute something conditioned. And behold, suddenly the world fell apart into a ‘true’ world and an ‘apparent’ world: and precisely the world that man’s reason had devised for him to live and settle in was discredited. Instead of employing the forms as a tool for making the world manageable and calculable, the madness of philosophers divined that in these categories is presented a concept of that world to which the one in which man lives does not correspond” (Nietzsche, KGW VIII/3:128; *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Random House, 1968 (1967)], §584, 314–15). On the assessment of the role of reason, cf. the following quotation, also from Nietzsche’s late work: “In the formation of reason, logic, the categories, it was *need* that was authoritative: the need, not to ‘know’ but to subsume, to schematize, for the purpose of intelligibility and calculation – (The development of reason is adjustment, invention, with the aim of making similar, equal)” (Nietzsche, KGW VIII/3:126; *Will to Power*, §515, 278).

## CONCLUSION

In closing, one must probably conclude that neither Kant nor the German idealists (including Hegel) who followed him on many points succeeded in carrying out the conception of a system as the single binding form for philosophy. This is certainly due, on the one hand, to the tight connection between the form of the system and reason, which, as in the case of Kant, was never properly convincing because of the all too vague concept of reason on which it was grounded, or else, as in the case of Hegel, because of the hypostatizing of reason needed to avoid this vagueness, which was regarded as manifestly implausible on account of its extravagance. On the other hand, however, it must also not be overlooked that the entire project of philosophy as a systematic cognition of the whole of reality from principles of reason suffers not only from the vagueness of the concept of reason or of its hypostatization, but just as much from being bound to a conception of reality that can in fact be considered too narrow on account of its demand of objectivity and its requirement of regularity. Jacobi pointed to this, as did Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, if perhaps not convincingly, at least sufficiently so to be taken seriously. But whether this means that the idea of system in philosophy has become generally obsolete is not decided by this. Yet since the nineteenth century it appears that no one has been ready to undertake the exertions necessary to revitalize this idea in the ambitious interpretation it was given by Kant. And it is not to be expected that this state of affairs will alter fundamentally in the foreseeable future.

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## **II**

### **LOGIC AND MATHEMATICS**



## ATTEMPTS TO RETHINK LOGIC

JEREMY HEIS

The period between Kant and Frege is widely held to be an inactive time in the history of logic, especially when compared to the periods that preceded and succeeded it. By the late eighteenth century, the rich and suggestive exploratory work of Leibniz had led to writings in symbolic logic by Lambert and Ploucquet.<sup>1</sup> But after Lambert this tradition effectively ended, and some of its innovations had to be rediscovered independently later in the century. Venn characterized the period between Lambert and Boole as “almost a blank in the history of the subject” and confessed an “uneasy suspicion” that a chief cause was the “disastrous effect on logical method” wrought by Kant’s philosophy.<sup>2</sup> De Morgan began his work in symbolic logic “facing Kant’s assertion that logic neither has improved since the time of Aristotle, nor of its own nature can improve.”<sup>3</sup>

De Morgan soon discovered, however, that the leading logician in Britain at the time, William Hamilton, had himself been teaching that the traditional logic was “perverted and erroneous in form.”<sup>4</sup> In Germany, Maimon argued

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Lambert, *Sechs Versuche einer Zeichenkunst in der Vernunftlehre*, in *Logische und philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed. J. Bernoulli, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1782). G. Ploucquet, *Sammlung der Schriften welche den logischen Calcul Herrn Professor Ploucquet’s betreffen, mit neuen Zusätzen* (Frankfurt, 1766).

<sup>2</sup> John Venn, *Symbolic Logic*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1894), xxxvii. (Original edition, 1881).

<sup>3</sup> Augustus De Morgan, “On the Syllogism III,” reprinted in *On the Syllogism and Other Writings*, ed. P. Heath (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), 74. (Original edition, 1858.) De Morgan is referring to Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bviii. For the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I follow the common practice of citing the original page numbers in the first (A) or second (B) edition of 1781 and 1787. Citations of works of Kant besides the *Critique of Pure Reason* are according to the German Academy (Ak) edition pagination: *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer [later Walter de Gruyter], 1900–). Passages from Kant’s *Logic* (edited by Kant’s student Jäsche and published under Kant’s name in 1800) are also cited by paragraph number (§) when appropriate. I use the translation in *Lectures on Logic*, ed. and trans. J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> De Morgan, “Syllogism III,” 75. Cf. William Hamilton, *Lectures on Logic*, eds. H. L. Mansel and John Veitch, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London: Blackwood, 1874), 2:251.



that Kant treated logic as complete only because he omitted the most important part of critique – a critique of logic itself.<sup>5</sup> Hegel, less interested in formal logic than Maimon, concurs that “if logic has not undergone any change since Aristotle, . . . then surely the conclusion which should be drawn is that it is all the more in need of a total reconstruction.”<sup>6</sup> On Hegel’s reconstruction, logic “coincides with metaphysics.”<sup>7</sup> Fries argued that Kant thought logic complete only because he neglected “anthropological logic,” a branch of empirical psychology that provides a theory of the capacities humans employ in thinking and a basis for the meager formal content given in “demonstrative” logic.<sup>8</sup> Trendelenburg later argued that the logic contained in Kant’s *Logic* is not Aristotle’s logic at all, but a *corruption* of it, since Aristotelian logic has metaphysical implications that Kant rejects.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find a single nineteenth-century logician who agrees with Kant’s notorious claim. However, this great expansion of logic – as some logical works branched out into metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, and psychology, while others introduced new symbolic techniques and representations – threatened to leave logicians with little common ground except for their rejection of Kant’s conservatism. Robert Adamson, in his survey of logical history for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, writes of nineteenth-century logical works that “in tone, in method, in aim, in fundamental principles, in extent of field, they diverge so widely as to appear, not so many expositions of the same science, but so many different sciences.”<sup>10</sup> Many historians of logic have understandably chosen to circumvent this problem by ignoring many of the logical works that were the most widely read and

<sup>5</sup> Salomon Maimon, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens: Nebst angehängten Briefen des Philaletes an Aenesidemus* (Berlin: Ernst Felisch, 1794), 404ff. Partially translated by George di Giovanni as *Essay towards a New Logic or Theory of Thought, Together with Letters of Philaletes to Aenesidemus*, in *Between Kant and Hegel*, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). Citations are from the pagination of the original German edition, which are reproduced in the English translation.

<sup>6</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 51. German edition: *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), 21:35. (Original edition, 1812–16, first volume revised in 1832.) I cite from the now-standard German edition, which contains the 1832 edition of “The Doctrine of Being,” the 1813 edition of “The Doctrine of Essence,” and the 1816 edition of “The Doctrine of the Concept” in vols. 21, 11, and 12, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, pt. 1 of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), §24. *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), 20: §24. (Original edition, 1817; second edition, 1830.) I cite paragraph numbers (§) throughout.

<sup>8</sup> Jakob Friedrich Fries, *System der Logik*, 3rd ed. (Heidelberg, 1837), 4–5. (Original edition, 1811.)

<sup>9</sup> Adolf Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1870), 1:32–3. (Original edition, 1840.)

<sup>10</sup> Robert Adamson, *A Short History of Logic* (London: W. Blackwood, 1911), 20. (Original edition, 1882.)

discussed during the period – the works of Hegel, Trendelenburg, Hamilton, Mill, Lotze, and Sigwart, for example.

The present article, however, aims to be a history of “logic” in the multifaceted ways in which this term was understood between Kant and Frege (though the history of inductive logic – overlapping with the mathematical theory of probabilities and with questions about scientific methodology – falls outside the purview of this article). There are at least two reasons for this wide perspective. First, the diversity of approaches to logic was accompanied by a continuous debate in the philosophy of logic over the nature, extent, and proper method in logic. Second, the various logical traditions that coexisted in the period – though at times isolated from one another – came to cross-pollinate with one another in important ways. The first three sections of the article trace out the evolving conceptions of logic in Germany and Britain. The last three address the century’s most significant debates over the nature of concepts, judgments and inferences, and logical symbolism.

#### KANTIAN AND POST-KANTIAN LOGICS

Surprisingly, Kant was widely held in the nineteenth century to have been a logical innovator. In 1912 Wilhelm Windelband wrote: “a century and a half ago, [logic] . . . stood as a well-built edifice firmly based on the Aristotelian foundation. . . . But, as is well-known, this state of things was entirely changed by Kant.”<sup>11</sup> Kant’s significance played itself out in two opposed directions: first, in his novel characterization of logic as formal; and, second, in the new conceptions of logic advocated by those post-Kantian philosophers who drew on Kant’s *transcendental* logic to attack Kant’s own narrower conception of the scope of logic.

Though today the idea that logic is formal seems traditional or even definitional, nineteenth-century logicians considered the idea to be a Kantian innovation. Trendelenburg summarized the recent history:<sup>12</sup>

Christian Wolff is still of the view that the grounds of logic derive from ontology and psychology and that logic precedes them only in the order in which the sciences are

<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm Windelband, *Theories in Logic*, trans. B. Ethel Meyer (New York: Citadel Press, 1961), 1. (Original edition, 1912.)

<sup>12</sup> Contemporary Kant interpreters do not agree on whether Kant’s thesis that logic is formal was in fact novel. Some agree with Trendelenburg that Kant’s thesis was an innovative doctrine that depended crucially on other distinctive features of Kant’s philosophy; others think that Kant was reviving or modifying a traditional, Scholastic conception. (For an excellent recent paper that defends Trendelenburg’s view, see John MacFarlane, “Frege, Kant, and the Logic in Logicism,” *Philosophical Review* 111 [2000]: 25–65.) However, irrespective of the accuracy of this interpretive claim, the point remains that the thesis that logic is formal was considered by nineteenth-century

studied. For the first time in Kant's critical philosophy, in which the distinction of matter and form is robustly conceived, *formal logic* clearly emerges and actually stands and falls with Kant.<sup>13</sup>

General logic for Kant contains the "absolutely necessary rules of thinking, without which no use of the understanding takes place."<sup>14</sup> The understanding – which Kant distinguishes from "sensibility" – is the faculty of "thinking," or "cognition through concepts."<sup>15</sup> Unlike Wolff, Kant claims a *pure* logic "has no empirical principles, thus it draws nothing from psychology."<sup>16</sup> The principles of psychology tell how we *do* think; the principles of pure general logic, how we *ought* to think.<sup>17</sup> The principles of logic do not of themselves imply metaphysical principles; Kant rejects Wolff and Baumgarten's proof of the principle of sufficient reason from the principle of contradiction.<sup>18</sup> Though logic is a canon, a set of rules, it is not an organon, a method for expanding our knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

For Kant, pure general logic neither presupposes nor of itself implies principles of any other science because it is *formal*. "General logic abstracts . . . from all content of cognition, i.e., from any relation of it to the object, and considers only the logical form in the relation of cognitions to one another."<sup>20</sup> In its treatment of concepts, formal logic takes no heed of the particular marks that a given concept contains, nor of the particular objects that are contained under it. In its treatment of judgments, formal logic attends merely to the different ways in which one concept can be contained in or under one another. (So in a judgment like "All whales are mammals," the word "all" and the copula "is" do not represent concepts, but express the *form* of the judgment, the particular way in which a thinker combines the concepts *whale* and *mammal*.)

logicians to be a Kantian innovation dependent on other parts of Kant's philosophy. Besides Trendelenburg, see also Maimon, *Logik*, xx; William Hamilton, "Recent Publications on Logical Sciences," reprinted in his *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform* (New York: Harper, 1861), 145; J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, reprinted as vol. 9 of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 355; De Morgan, "Syllogism III," 76; and Henry Mansel, *Prolegomena Logica: An Inquiry into the Psychological Character of Logical Processes*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1860), iv–v. Among these logicians, Hamilton was unique in recognizing the affinity between Kant's conception of logic and Scholastic notions.

<sup>13</sup> Trendelenburg, *Untersuchungen*, I, 15. In this passage, Trendelenburg cites Christian Wolff, *Philosophia rationalis sive Logica* (Frankfurt, 1728), §88–9.

<sup>14</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A52/B76.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A50/B74; Kant, Ak 9:91.

<sup>16</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A54/B78.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, Ak 9:14.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, Ak 4:270. See Christian Wolff, *Philosophia prima sive ontologia* (Frankfurt, 1730), §70. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, 3rd ed. (Halle: Hammerde, 1757).

<sup>19</sup> Kant, Ak 9:13.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A55/B79.

The generality of logic requires this kind of formality because Kant, as an essential part of his critique of dogmatic metaphysicians such as Leibniz and Wolff, distinguishes mere thinking from cognizing (or knowing).<sup>21</sup> Kant argues against traditional metaphysics that, since we can have no intuition of noumena, we cannot have cognitions or knowledge of them. But we can coherently *think* noumena.<sup>22</sup> This kind of thinking is necessary for *moral faith*, where the subject is not an object of intuition, but, for example, the divine being as moral lawgiver and just judge. Thus, formal logic, which abstracts from all content of cognition, makes it possible for us coherently to conceive of God and things in themselves.

The thesis of the formality of logic, then, is intertwined with some of the most controversial aspects of the critical philosophy: the distinction between sensibility and understanding, appearances and things in themselves. Once these Kantian “dualisms” came under severe criticism, post-Kantian philosophers also began to reject the possibility of an independent formal logic.<sup>23</sup> Hegel, for example, begins his *Science of Logic* with a polemic against Kant’s conception of formal logic: if there are no unknowable things in themselves, then the rules of thinking are rules for thinking an object, and the principles of logic become the first principles of ontology.<sup>24</sup>

Further, Kant’s insistence that the principles of logic are not drawn from psychology or metaphysics leaves open a series of epistemological questions. How then do we know the principle of contradiction? How do we know that there are precisely twelve logical forms of judgment? Or that some figures of the syllogism are valid and others not? Many agreed with Hegel that Kant’s answers had “no other justification than that we *find* such species *already* to

<sup>21</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B146.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B166n.

<sup>23</sup> A classic attack on Kant’s distinction between sensibility and understanding is Salomon Maimon, *Versuch über die Transcendentalphilosophie*, reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Valerio Verra, vol. 2, (Hildesheim: Olms, 1965–76), 63–4. A classic attack on Kant’s distinction between appearances and things in themselves is F. H. Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus: Ein Gespräch* (Breslau: Gottlieb Löwe, 1787). I have emphasized that Kant defends the coherence of the doctrine of unknowable things in themselves by distinguishing between thinking and knowing – where thinking, unlike knowing, does not require the joint operation of sensibility and understanding. Formal logic, by providing rules for the use of the understanding and abstracting from all content provided by sensibility, makes room for the idea that we can coherently think of things in themselves. Now, the fact that Kant defends the coherence of his more controversial doctrines by appealing to the formality of logic does not yet imply that an attack on Kantian “dualisms” need also undermine the thesis that logic is formal. But, as we will see, many post-Kantian philosophers thought that an attack on Kant’s distinctions would also undermine the formality thesis – or at least they thought that such an attack would leave the formality of logic unmotivated.

<sup>24</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 43–8 (Werke 21:28–32).

hand and they present themselves *empirically*.”<sup>25</sup> Kant’s unreflective procedure endangers both the *a priori* *purity* and the *certainty* of logic.<sup>26</sup>

Though Kant says only that “the labors of the logicians were ready to hand,”<sup>27</sup> his successors were quick to propose novel answers to these questions. Fries appealed to introspective psychology, and he reproved Kant for overstating the independence of “demonstrative logic” from anthropology.<sup>28</sup> Others grounded formal logic in what Kant called “transcendental logic.” Transcendental logic contains the rules of *a priori* thinking.<sup>29</sup> Since all use of the understanding, inasmuch as it is cognizing an object, requires *a priori* concepts (the categories), transcendental logic then expounds also “the principles without which no object can be thought at all.”<sup>30</sup> Reinhold argued – against Kant’s “Metaphysical Deduction” of the categories from the forms of judgments – that the principles of pure general logic should be derived from a transcendental principle (such as his own principle of consciousness).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, logic can only be a science if it is systematic, and this systematicity (on Reinhold’s view) requires that logic be derived from an indemonstrable first principle.<sup>32</sup>

Maimon’s 1794 *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens*, which contains both an extended discussion of formal logic and an extended transcendental logic, partially carries out Reinhold’s program. There are two highest principles: the principle of contradiction (which is the highest principle of all analytic judgments) and Maimon’s own “principle of determinability” (which is the highest principle of all synthetic judgments).<sup>33</sup> Since formal logic presupposes transcendental logic,<sup>34</sup> Maimon defines the various forms of judgment (such as affirmative and negative) using transcendental concepts (such as reality

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 613 (Werke 12:43).

<sup>26</sup> See also J. G. Fichte, “First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge,” in *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1:442. See *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte, vol. 1 (Berlin: Veit, 1845–6), reprinted as *Fichtes Werke* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971). (Original edition of “First Introduction,” 1797.) Citations are by volume and page number from I. H. Fichte’s edition, which are reproduced in the margins of the English translations. K. L. Reinhold, *The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge*, trans. George di Giovanni in *Between Kant and Hegel*, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 119. Citations follow the pagination of the original 1794 edition, *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* (Jena, 1794), which are reproduced in the margins of the English edition.

<sup>27</sup> Kant, Ak 4:323.

<sup>28</sup> Fries, *Logik*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A57/B81.

<sup>30</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A62/B87.

<sup>31</sup> Reinhold, *Foundation*, 118–21.

<sup>32</sup> See also J. G. Fichte, “Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” trans. Daniel Breazeale in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1:41–2. (Original edition, 1794.)

<sup>33</sup> Maimon, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens*, 19–20.

<sup>34</sup> Maimon, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens*, xx–xxii.

and negation). He proves various features of syllogisms (such as that the conclusion of a valid syllogism is affirmative iff both its premises are) using the transcendental principle of determinability.<sup>35</sup>

Hegel's *Science of Logic* is surely the most ambitious and influential of the logical works that include both formal and transcendental material.<sup>36</sup> However, Hegel cites as a chief inspiration – not Maimon, but – Fichte. For Hegel, Fichte's philosophy “reminded us that the *thought-determinations* must be exhibited in their *necessity*, and that it is essential for them to be *deduced*.”<sup>37</sup> In Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, the whole system of necessary representations is deduced from a single fundamental and indemonstrable principle.<sup>38</sup> In his 1794 book, *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, Fichte derives from the first principle “I am I” not only the category of reality, but also the logical law “ $A = A$ ”; in subsequent stages he derives the category of negation, the logical law “ $\sim A$  is not equal to  $A$ ,” and finally even the various logical forms of judgment. Kant's reaction, given in his 1799 “Open Letter on Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*,” is unsurprising: Fichte has confused the proper domain of logic with metaphysics.<sup>39</sup> Later, Fichte follows the project of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to its logical conclusion: transcendental logic “destroys” the common logic in its foundations, and it is necessary to refute (in Kant's name) the very possibility of formal logic.<sup>40</sup>

Hegel turned Kant's criticism of Fichte on its head: were the critical philosophy consistently thought out, logic and metaphysics would in fact coincide. For Kant, the understanding can combine or synthesize a sensible manifold, but it cannot itself produce the manifold. For Hegel, however, there can be an *absolute* synthesis, in which thinking itself provides contentful concepts independently of sensibility.<sup>41</sup> Kant had argued that if the limitations of thinking are disregarded, reason falls into illusion. In a surprising twist, Hegel uses this dialectical nature of pure reason to make possible his own non-Kantian doctrine of synthesis. Generalizing Kant's antinomies to all concepts, Hegel argues that any pure concept, when thought through, leads to its opposite.<sup>42</sup> This back-and-forth transition from a concept to its opposite – which Hegel

<sup>35</sup> Maimon, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens*, 94–5.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 62 (Werke 21:46).

<sup>37</sup> Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, §42.

<sup>38</sup> Fichte, “First Introduction,” 1:445–6.

<sup>39</sup> Kant, Ak 12:370–1.

<sup>40</sup> J. G. Fichte, “Ueber das Verhältniß der Logik zur Philosophie oder transscendentale Logik,” reprinted in *Fichtes Werke*, 9:111–12. This text is from a lecture course delivered in 1812.

<sup>41</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1977), 72 (Werke 4:328). (Original edition, 1802.)

<sup>42</sup> Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, §48.

calls the “dialectical moment” – can itself be synthesized into a new unitary concept – which Hegel calls the “speculative moment,” and the process can be repeated.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the most immediate judgment, the positive judgment (e.g., “the rose is red”), asserts that the individual is a universal. But since the rose is more than red, and the universal *red* applies to more than the rose, the individual is not the universal, and we arrive at the *negative* judgment.<sup>44</sup> Hegel iterates this procedure until he arrives at a complete system of categories, forms of judgment, logical laws, and forms of the syllogism. Moreover, by beginning with the absolutely indeterminate and abstract thought of *being*,<sup>45</sup> he has rejected Reinhold’s demand that logic begin with a first principle: Hegel’s *Logic* is “preceded by . . . total presuppositionlessness.”<sup>46</sup>

### THE REVIVAL OF LOGIC IN BRITAIN

The turnaround in the fortunes of logic in Britain was by near consensus attributed to Whately’s 1826 *Elements of Logic*.<sup>47</sup> A work that well illustrates the prevailing view of logic in the Anglophone world before Whately is Harvard Professor of Logic Levi Hedge’s *Elements of Logick*. The purpose of logic, Hedge claims, is to direct the intellectual powers in the investigation and communication of truths.<sup>48</sup> This means that a logical treatise must trace the progress of knowledge from simple perceptions to the highest discoveries of reasoning. The work thus reads more like Locke’s *Essay* than Kant’s *Logic* – it draws heavily not only on Locke, but also on Reid and on Hume’s laws of the associations of ideas. Syllogistic, however, is discussed only in a footnote – since syllogistic is “of no use in helping us to the discovery of new truths.”<sup>49</sup> Hedge here cites Locke’s *Essay*,<sup>50</sup> where Locke argued that syllogistic is not necessary for reasoning well – “God has not been so sparing to Men to make them barely two-legged Creatures, and left it to *Aristotle* to make them Rational.” Syllogisms, Locke claims, are of no use in the discovery of new truths or the finding of new

<sup>43</sup> Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, §§81–2.

<sup>44</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 594, 632ff. (Werke 12:27, 61ff.).

<sup>45</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 70 (Werke 21:58–9).

<sup>46</sup> Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, §78.

<sup>47</sup> See De Morgan, “Logic,” reprinted in *On the Syllogism*, 247. (De Morgan’s essay first appeared in 1860.) Hamilton, “Recent Publications,” 128. (Original edition, 1833.) John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, reprinted as vols. 7 and 8 of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 7:cxiv. (Original edition, 1843.)

<sup>48</sup> Levi Hedge, *Elements of Logick* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1816), 13.

<sup>49</sup> Hedge, *Logick*, 152, 148.

<sup>50</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch, based on 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), IV.xvii.4.

proofs; indeed, they are inferior in this respect to simply arranging ideas “in a simple and plain order.”

For Whately, Locke’s objection that logic is unserviceable in the discovery of the truth misses the mark, because it assumes a mistaken view of logic.<sup>51</sup> The chief error of the “schoolmen” was the unrealizable expectation they raised: that logic would be an art that furnishes the sole instrument for the discovery of truth, that the syllogism would be an engine for the investigation of nature.<sup>52</sup> Fundamentally, logic is a science and not an art.<sup>53</sup> Putting an argument into syllogistic form need not add to the certainty of the inference, any more than natural laws make it more certain that heavy objects fall. Indeed, Aristotle’s *dictum de omni et nullo* is like a natural law: it provides an *account* of the correctness of an argument; it shows us the one general principle according to which takes place every individual case of correct reasoning. A logician’s goal then is to show that all correct reasoning is conducted according to one general principle – Aristotle’s *dictum* – and is an instance of the same mental process – syllogistic.<sup>54</sup>

In Hamilton’s wide-ranging and erudite review of Whately’s *Elements*, he acknowledged that Whately’s chief service was to correct mistakes about the nature of logic, but he excoriated his fellow Anglophones for their ignorance of historical texts and contemporary German logics. Indeed, we can more adequately purify logic of intrusions from psychology and metaphysics and more convincingly disabuse ourselves of the conviction that logic is an “instrument of scientific discovery” by accepting Kant’s idea that logic is *formal*.<sup>55</sup> Hamilton’s lectures on logic, delivered in 1837–8 using the German Kantian logics written by Krug and Esser,<sup>56</sup> thus introduced into Britain the Kantian idea that logic is formal.<sup>57</sup> For him, the form of thought is the kind and manner of thinking an object<sup>58</sup> or the relation of the subject to the object.<sup>59</sup> He distinguishes logic from psychology (against Whately) as the science of the *product*, not the *process*, of thinking. Since the forms of thinking studied by logic are *necessary*, there must be *laws* of thought: the principles of identity, contradiction, and excluded middle).<sup>60</sup> He distinguishes physical laws

<sup>51</sup> Richard Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 9th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1866), 15. (Original edition, 1826.)

<sup>52</sup> Whately, *Elements of Logic*, viii, 4, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 75.

<sup>55</sup> Hamilton, “Recent Publications,” 139.

<sup>56</sup> Wilhelm Traugott Krug, *Denklehre oder Logik* (Königsberg: Goebbels & Unzer, 1806). Jakob Esser, *System der Logik*, 2nd ed. (Münster, 1830). (Original edition, 1823.)

<sup>57</sup> Hamilton, *Logic*. I cite from the 1874 3rd ed. (Original edition, 1860.)

<sup>58</sup> Hamilton, *Logic*, 1:13.

<sup>59</sup> Hamilton, *Logic*, 1:73.

<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, *Logic*, 1:17, 2:246.



from “formal laws of thought,” which thinkers *ought* to – though they do not always – follow.<sup>61</sup>

Mill later severely (and justly) criticized Hamilton for failing to characterize the distinction between the matter and form of thinking adequately. Mill argued that it is impossible to take over Kant’s matter/form distinction without also taking on all of Kant’s transcendental idealism.<sup>62</sup> Mansel tries to clarify the distinction between matter and form by arguing that the form of thinking is expressed in analytic judgments. He claims (as neither Hamilton nor Kant himself had done explicitly) that the three laws of thought are themselves analytic judgments and that the entire content of logic is derivable from these three laws.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Mansel further departs from Kant and Hamilton by restricting the task of logic to characterizing the form and laws of *only* analytic judgments.<sup>64</sup>

In his 1828 review, Mill criticized Whately for concluding that inductive logic – that is, the rules for the investigation and discovery of truth – could never be put into a form as systematic and scientific as syllogistic.<sup>65</sup> Mill’s *System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, which was centered around Mill’s famous five canons of experimental inquiry, aimed to do precisely what Whately thought impossible. The work, which included material we would now describe as philosophy of science, went through eight editions and became widely used in colleges throughout nineteenth-century Britain. Logic for Mill is the science as well as the art of reasoning;<sup>66</sup> it concerns the operations of the understanding in giving proofs and estimating evidence.<sup>67</sup> Mill argued that in fact all reasoning is inductive.<sup>68</sup> There is an inconsistency, Mill alleges, in thinking that the conclusion of a syllogism (e.g., “Socrates is mortal”) is known on the basis of the premises (e.g., “All humans are mortal” and “Socrates is human”), while also admitting that the syllogism is vicious if the conclusion is not already asserted

<sup>61</sup> Hamilton, *Logic*, 1:78. Hamilton unfortunately muddies the distinction between the two kinds of laws by lining it up with the Kantian distinction between the doctrine of elements and the doctrine of method (*Logic*, 1:64).

<sup>62</sup> Mill, *Examination*, 355. (Original edition, 1865.)

<sup>63</sup> Mansel, *Prolegomena*, 159. (Original edition, 1851.) A similar position had been defended earlier by Fries, *Logik*, §40. Mansel almost certainly got the idea from Fries.

<sup>64</sup> Mansel, *Prolegomena*, 202. Although Kant did say that the truth of an analytic judgment could be derived entirely from logical laws (see, e.g., *Critique of Pure Reason*, A151/B190–1), he always thought that logic considered the forms of all judgments whatsoever, whether analytic or synthetic.

<sup>65</sup> John Stuart Mill, “Whately’s Elements of Logic,” reprinted in vol. 11 of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978). Cf. Whately, *Elements*, 168; Mill, *Logic*, cxii.

<sup>66</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 12.

<sup>68</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 202.

in the premises.<sup>69</sup> Mill's solution to this paradox is that the syllogistic inference is only apparent: the real inference is the induction from the particular facts about the mortality of particular individuals to the mortality of Socrates. The inference is then actually finished when we assert, "All men are mortal."<sup>70</sup>

The debate over whether logic is an art and the study of logic useful for reasoning dovetailed with concurrent debates over curricular reform at Oxford. By 1830, Oxford was the only British institution of higher learning where the study of logic had survived.<sup>71</sup> Some, such as Whewell, advocated making its study elective, allowing students to train their reasoning by taking a course on Euclid's *Elements*.<sup>72</sup> Hamilton opposed this proposal,<sup>73</sup> as did the young mathematician Augustus De Morgan, who thought that the study of syllogistic facilitates a student's understanding of geometrical proofs.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, De Morgan's first foray into logical research occurred in a mathematical textbook, where, in a chapter instructing his students on putting Euclidean proofs into syllogistic form, he noticed that some proofs require treating "is equal to" as a copula distinct from "is," though obeying all of the same rules.<sup>75</sup>

These reflections on mathematical pedagogy led eventually to De Morgan's logical innovations. In his *Formal Logic*,<sup>76</sup> De Morgan noted that the rules of the syllogism work for copulae other than "is" – as long as they have the formal properties of transitivity, reflexivity, and what De Morgan calls "contrariety."<sup>77</sup> Transitivity is the common form, and what distinguishes "is" from "is equal to" is their matter. This generalization of the copula culminated in De Morgan's paper "On the Syllogism IV," the first systematic study of the logic of relations.<sup>78</sup> He considers propositions of the form "*A..LB*" ("*A* is one of the *Ls* of *B*"), where "*L*" denotes any relation of subject to predicate. He thinks of "*A*" as the subject term, "*B*" as the predicate term, and "*..L*" as the relational expression that functions as the copula connecting subject and predicate.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 185.

<sup>70</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 186–7.

<sup>71</sup> Hamilton, "Recent Publications," 124. De Morgan, "On the Methods of Teaching the Elements of Geometry," *Quarterly Journal of Education* 6 (1833): 251.

<sup>72</sup> W. Whewell, *Thoughts on the Study of Mathematics as Part of a Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Deighton, 1835).

<sup>73</sup> Hamilton, "On the Study of Mathematics, as an Exercise of Mind," reprinted in *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform*. (Original edition, 1836.)

<sup>74</sup> De Morgan, "Methods of Teaching," 238–9.

<sup>75</sup> Augustus De Morgan, *On the Study and Difficulties of Mathematics* (London: Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, 1831).

<sup>76</sup> Augustus De Morgan, *Formal Logic* (London: Taylor & Walton, 1847).

<sup>77</sup> De Morgan, *Formal Logic*, 57–9.

<sup>78</sup> De Morgan, "On the Syllogism IV," reprinted in *On the Syllogism*. (Original edition, 1860.)

<sup>79</sup> The two dots preceding "*L*" indicate that the statement is affirmative; an odd number of dots indicates that the proposition is negative.

Thus, if we let “ $L$ ” mean “loves,” then “ $A..LB$ ” would mean that “ $A$  is one of the lovers of  $B$ ” – or just “ $A$  loves  $B$ .” He symbolized contraries using lower-case letters: “ $A..lB$ ” means “ $A$  is one of the nonlovers of  $B$ ” or “ $A$  does not love  $B$ .” Inverse relations are symbolized using the familiar algebraic expression: “ $A..L^{-1}B$ ” means “ $A$  is loved by  $B$ .” Importantly, De Morgan also considered compound relations, or what we would now call “relative products”: “ $A..LPB$ ” means “ $A$  is a lover of a parent of  $B$ .” De Morgan recognized, moreover, that reasoning with compound relations required some simple quantificational distinctions. We symbolize “ $A$  is a lover of *every* parent of  $B$ ” by adding an accent: “ $A..LP'B$ .” De Morgan was thus able to state some basic facts and prove some theorems about compound relations. For instance, the contrary of  $LP$  is  $lP'$  and the converse of the contrary of  $LP$  is  $p^{-1}L^{-1}$ .<sup>80</sup>

De Morgan recognized that calling features of the copula “is” *material* departed from the Kantian view that the copula is part of the form of a judgment.<sup>81</sup> De Morgan, however, thought that the logician’s matter/form distinction could be clarified by the mathematician’s notion of form.<sup>82</sup> From the mathematician’s practice we learn two things. First, the form/matter distinction is relative to one’s level of abstraction: the algebraist’s  $x + y$  is formal with respect to  $4 + 3$ , but  $x + y$  as an operation on numbers is distinguished only materially from the similar operations done on vectors or differential operators.<sup>83</sup> Second, the form of thinking is best understood on analogy with the principle of a *machine* in operation.<sup>84</sup>

In thinking of mathematics as a mechanism, De Morgan is characterizing mathematics as fundamentally a matter of applying operations to symbols according to laws of their combinations. Here De Morgan is drawing on work done by his fellow British algebraists. (In fact, De Morgan’s logical work is the confluence of three independent intellectual currents: the debate raging from Locke to Whately over the value of syllogistic, the German debate – imported by Hamilton – over Kant’s matter/form distinction,<sup>85</sup> and the mathematical debate

<sup>80</sup> Spelled out a bit (and leaving off the quotation marks for readability): that  $LP$  is the contrary of  $lP'$  means that  $A..LPB$  is false iff  $A..lP'B$  is true. That is,  $A$  does not love any of  $B$ ’s parents iff  $A$  is a nonlover of every parent of  $B$ . That the converse of the contrary of  $LP$  is  $p^{-1}L^{-1}$  means that  $A..LPB$  is false iff  $B..p^{-1}L^{-1}A$  is true. That is,  $A$  does not love any of  $B$ ’s parents iff  $B$  is not the child of anyone  $A$  loves.

<sup>81</sup> De Morgan, “On the Syllogism II,” reprinted in *On the Syllogism*, 57–8. (Original edition, 1850.)

<sup>82</sup> De Morgan, “Syllogism III,” 78.

<sup>83</sup> De Morgan, “Logic,” 248; “Syllogism III,” 78.

<sup>84</sup> De Morgan, “Syllogism III,” 75.

<sup>85</sup> We saw earlier that Mill argued that one could not maintain that logic is “formal” unless one were willing to take on Kant’s matter/form distinction – and therefore also Kant’s *transcendental idealism*. De Morgan, on the other hand, thought that introducing the *mathematician’s* notion of “form” would allow logicians to capture what is correct in Kant’s idea that logic is formal, but without having to take on the rest of the baggage of Kantianism. However, the effect of making

centered at Cambridge over the justification of certain algebraic techniques.) As a rival to Newton's geometric fluxional calculus, the Cambridge "Analytical Society" together translated Lacroix's *An Elementary Treatise on the Differential and Integral Calculus*, a calculus text that contained, among other material, an algebraic treatment of the calculus drawing on Lagrange's 1797 *Théorie des fonctions analytiques*. Lagrange thought that every function could be expanded into a power series expansion, and its derivative defined purely algebraically. Leibniz's " $dx/dy$ " was not thought of as a quotient, but as "a differential operator" applied to a function. These operators could then be profitably thought of as mathematical objects subject to algebraic manipulation<sup>86</sup> – even though differential operators are neither numbers nor geometrical magnitudes. This led algebraists to ask just how widely algebraic operations could be applied, and to ask after the reason for their wide applicability. (And these questions would be given a very satisfactory answer if logic itself were a kind of algebra.)

A related conceptual expansion of algebra resulted from the use of negative and imaginary numbers. Peacock's *A Treatise on Algebra* provided a novel justification: he distinguished "arithmetical algebra" from "symbolic algebra" – a strictly formal science of symbols and their combinations, where " $a-b$ " is meaningful even if  $a < b$ . Facts in arithmetical algebra can be transferred into symbolic algebra by the "principle of the permanence of equivalent forms."<sup>87</sup> Duncan Gregory defined symbolic algebra as the "science which treats of the combination of operations defined not by their nature, that is, by what they are or what they do, but by the laws of combination to which they are subject."<sup>88</sup> This is the background to De Morgan's equating the mathematician's notion of form with the operation of a mechanism.

Gregory identifies five different kinds of symbolic algebras.<sup>89</sup> One algebra is commutative, distributive, and subject to the law  $a^m \cdot a^n = a^{m+n}$ . George Boole, renaming the third law the "index law," followed Gregory in making these three the fundamental laws of the algebra of differential operators.<sup>90</sup> Three years later Boole introduced an algebra of logic that obeys these same laws,

use of this notion of form taken from British algebra is – for better or worse – to transform Kant's way of conceiving the formality of logic.

<sup>86</sup> As did Servois; see F. J. Servois, *Essai sur un nouveau mode d'exposition des principes du calcul différentiel* (Paris: Nismes, 1814).

<sup>87</sup> George Peacock, *A Treatise on Algebra*, vol. 1, *Arithmetical Algebra*; vol. 2, *On Symbolical Algebra and Its Applications to the Geometry of Position*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1842–5), II 59. (Original edition, 1830.)

<sup>88</sup> Duncan Gregory, "On the Real Nature of Symbolical Algebra," reprinted in *The Mathematical Works of Duncan Farquharson Gregory*, ed. William Walton (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1865), 2. (Original edition, 1838.)

<sup>89</sup> Gregory, "Symbolical Algebra," 6–7.

<sup>90</sup> George Boole, "On a General Method in Analysis," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 134 (1844): 225–82.

with the index law modified to  $x^n = x$  for  $n$  nonzero.<sup>91</sup> The symbolic algebra defined by these three laws could be interpreted in different ways: as an algebra of the numbers 0 and 1, as an algebra of classes, or as an algebra of propositions.<sup>92</sup> Understood as classes,  $ab$  is the class of things that are in  $a$  and in  $b$ ;  $a + b$  is the class of things that are in  $a$  or in  $b$ , but not in both; and  $a - b$  is the class of things that are in  $a$  and not in  $b$ ; 0 and 1 are the empty class and the universe. The index law holds (e.g., for  $n = 2$ ) because the class of things that are in both  $x$  and  $x$  is just  $x$ . These three laws are more fundamental than Aristotle's *dictum*;<sup>93</sup> in fact, the principle of contradiction is derivable from the index law, since  $x - x^2 = x(1 - x) = 0$ .<sup>94</sup>

The class of propositions in Boole's algebra – equations with arbitrary numbers of class terms combined by multiplication, addition, and subtraction – is wider than the class amenable to syllogistic, which only handles one subject and one predicate class per proposition.<sup>95</sup> Just as important, Boole can avoid all of the traditional techniques of conversion, mood, and figure by employing algebraic techniques for the solution of logical equations. Despite the impressive power of Boole's method, it falls well short of modern standards of rigor. The solution of equations generally involves eliminating factors, and so dividing class terms – even though Boole admits that no logical interpretation can be given to division.<sup>96</sup> But since Boole allows himself to treat logical equations as propositions about the numbers 0 and 1, the interpretation of division is reduced to interpreting the coefficients “1/1,” “1/0,” “0/1,” and “0/0.” Using informal justifications that convinced few, he rejected “1/0” as meaningless and threw out every term with it as a coefficient, and he interpreted “0/0” as referring to some indefinite class “ $v$ .”

Boole, clearly influenced by Peacock, argued that there was no necessity in giving an interpretation to logical division, since the validity of any “symbolic process of reasoning” depends only on the interpretability of the final conclusion.<sup>97</sup> Jevons thought this an incredible position for a *logician* and discarded division in order to make all results in his system interpretable.<sup>98</sup> Venn

<sup>91</sup> George Boole, *The Mathematical Analysis of Logic* (Cambridge: Macmillan, Barclay & Macmillan, 1847), 16–18.

<sup>92</sup> George Boole, *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought* (London: Walton & Maberly, 1854), 37.

<sup>93</sup> Boole, *Mathematical Analysis*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 49.

<sup>95</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 238.

<sup>96</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 66ff.

<sup>97</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 66ff.

<sup>98</sup> William Stanley Jevons, “Pure Logic or The Logic of Quality Apart from Quantity, with Remarks on Boole's System and on the Relation of Logic to Mathematics,” reprinted in *Pure Logic and Other Minor Works*, eds. Robert Adamson and Harriet A. Jevons (New York: Macmillan, 1890), §174 and §197ff. (Original edition, 1864.)

retained logical division but interpreted it as “logical abstraction” – as had Schröder, whose 1877 book introduced Boolean logic into Germany.<sup>99</sup> Boole had interpreted disjunction exclusively, allowing him to interpret his equations indifferently as about classes or the algebra of the numbers 0 and 1 (for which “ $x + y$ ” has meaning only if  $xy = 0$ ). Jevons argued that “or” in ordinary language is actually inclusive, and he effected great simplification in his system by introducing the law  $A + A = A$ .<sup>100</sup>

Peirce departs from Boole’s inconvenient practice of only considering equations and introduces a primitive symbol for class inclusion. Peirce also combines in a fruitful way Boole’s algebra with De Morgan’s logic of relations. He conceives of relations (not as copulae, but) as classes of ordered pairs,<sup>101</sup> and he introduces Boolean operations on relations. Thus “ $l + s$ ” means “lover or servant.”<sup>102</sup> This research culminated in Peirce’s 1883 “The Logic of Relatives,” which independently of Frege introduced into the Boolean tradition polyadic quantification.<sup>103</sup> Peirce writes the relative term “lover” as

$$l = \sum_i \sum_j (l)_{ij} (I : J)$$

where “ $\Sigma$ ” denotes the summation operator, “ $I : J$ ” denotes an ordered pair of individuals, and “ $(l)_{ij}$ ” denotes a coefficient whose value is 1 if  $I$  does love  $J$ , and 0 otherwise.<sup>104</sup> Then, for instance,

$$\Pi_i \sum_j (l)_{ij} > 0$$

means “everybody loves somebody.”<sup>105</sup>

## GERMAN LOGIC AFTER HEGEL

As post-Kantian idealism waned after Hegel’s death, the most significant German logicians – Trendelenburg, Lotze, Sigwart, and Überweg – came to

<sup>99</sup> Venn, *Symbolic Logic*, 73ff. Ernst Schröder, *Der Operationskreis des Logikkalküls* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877), 33.

<sup>100</sup> Jevons, “Pure Logic,” §178, §193; cf. Schröder, *Operationskreis*, 3. Though Jevons’s practice of treating disjunction inclusively has since become standard, Boole’s practice was in keeping with the tradition. Traditional logicians tended to think of disjunction on the model of the relation between different subspecies within a genus, and since two subspecies exclude one another, so too did disjunctive judgments. (See, e.g., Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A73–4/B99.)

<sup>101</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, “Description of a Notation for the Logic of Relatives, Resulting from an Amplification of the Conceptions of Boole’s Calculus of Logic,” reprinted in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 3, *Exact Logic*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933), 76. (Original edition, 1870.)

<sup>102</sup> Peirce, “Description,” 38.

<sup>103</sup> Peirce, “The Logic of Relatives,” reprinted in *Collected Papers*, vol. 3. (Original edition, 1883.)

<sup>104</sup> Peirce, “The Logic of Relatives,” 195.

<sup>105</sup> Peirce, “The Logic of Relatives,” 207.

prefer a middle way between a “subjectively formal” logic and an identification of logic with metaphysics.<sup>106</sup> On this view, logic is not the study of mere thinking or of being itself, but of *knowledge* – a position articulated earlier in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Dialektik*.

In lectures given between 1811 and 1833, Schleiermacher calls his “dialectic” the “science of the supreme principles of knowing” and “the art of scientific thinking.”<sup>107</sup> To produce knowledge is an activity, and so the discipline that studies that activity is an art, not a mere canon.<sup>108</sup> This activity is fundamentally social and occurs within a definite historical context. Schleiermacher thus rejects the Fichtean project of founding all knowledge on a first principle; instead, our knowledge always begins “in the middle.”<sup>109</sup> Because individuals acquire knowledge together with other people, dialectic is also – playing up the Socratic meaning – “the art of conversation in pure thinking.”<sup>110</sup> Though transcendental and formal philosophy are one,<sup>111</sup> the principles of being and the principles of knowing are not identical. Rather, there is a kind of parallelism between the two realms. For example, corresponding to the fact that our thinking employs concepts and judgments is the fact that the world is composed of substantial forms standing in systematic causal relations.<sup>112</sup>

Trendelenburg, whose enthusiasm for Aristotle’s logic over its modern perversions led him to publish a new edition of Aristotle’s organon for student use,<sup>113</sup> agreed with Schleiermacher that logical principles correspond to, but are not identical with, metaphysical principles. But unlike Schleiermacher,<sup>114</sup> Trendelenburg thought that syllogisms are indispensable for laying out the real relations of dependence among things in nature, and he argued that there is a

<sup>106</sup> See Friedrich Überweg, *System of Logic and History of Logical Doctrines*, trans. Thomas M. Lindsay (London: Longmans, Green, 1871), §1, §34. *System der Logik und Geschichte der logischen Lehren*, 3rd ed. (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1868). (Original edition, 1857.)

<sup>107</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialectic or The Art of Doing Philosophy*, ed. and trans. T. N. Tice (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1996), 1–5. *Dialektik* (1811), ed. Andreas Arndt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986), 3–5, 84. These books contain lecture notes from Schleiermacher’s first lecture course.

<sup>108</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, ed. L. Jonas as vol. 4 of the second part of *Friedrich Schleiermacher’s sämtliche Werke. Dritte Abtheilung: Zur Philosophie* (Berlin: Reimer, 1839), 364. The Jonas edition of *Dialektik* contains notes and drafts produced between 1811 and 1833. Schleiermacher’s target here is, of course, Kant, who thought that though logic is a set of rules (a “canon”), it is not an “organon” – an instrument for expanding our knowledge.

<sup>109</sup> Schleiermacher, *Dialectic*, 3 (*Dialektik* (1811), 3). Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, §291.

<sup>110</sup> Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, §1.

<sup>111</sup> Schleiermacher, *Dialectic*, 1–2 (*Dialektik* (1811), 5).

<sup>112</sup> Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, §195.

<sup>113</sup> Adolf Trendelenburg, *Excerpta ex Organo Aristotelis* (Berlin: G. Bethge, 1836).

<sup>114</sup> For Schleiermacher, syllogistic is not worth studying, since no new knowledge can arise through syllogisms. See Schleiermacher, *Dialectic*, 36 (*Dialektik* (1811), 30); Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, §§327–9.

parallelism between the movement from premise to conclusion and the movements of bodies in nature.<sup>115</sup>

In 1873 and 1874 Christoph Sigwart and Hermann Lotze produced the two German logic texts that were perhaps most widely read in the last decades of the nineteenth century – a period that saw a real spike in the publication of new logic texts. Sigwart sought to “reconstruct logic from the point of view of methodology.”<sup>116</sup> Lotze’s *Logic* begins with an account of how the operations of thought allow a subject to apprehend truths.<sup>117</sup> In the current of ideas in the mind, some ideas flow together only because of accidental features of the world; some ideas flow together because the realities that give rise to them are in fact related in a nonaccidental way. It is the task of thought to distinguish these two cases – to “reduce coincidence to coherence” – and it is the task of logic to investigate how the concepts, judgments, and inferences of thought introduce this coherence.<sup>118</sup>

The debate over the relation between logic and psychology, which had been ongoing since Kant, reached a fever pitch in the *Psychologismus-Streit* of the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The term “psychologism” was coined by the Hegelian J. E. Erdmann to describe the philosophy of Friedrich Beneke.<sup>119</sup> Erdmann had earlier argued in his own logical work that Hegel, for whom logic is presuppositionless, had decisively shown that logic in no way depends on psychology – logic is not, as Beneke argued, “applied psychology.”<sup>120</sup>

Contemporary philosophers often associate psychologism with the confusion between laws describing how we do think and laws prescribing how we ought to think.<sup>121</sup> This distinction appears in Kant<sup>122</sup> and was repeated many times throughout the century.<sup>123</sup> The psychologism debate, however, was

<sup>115</sup> Trendelenburg, *Untersuchungen*, II 388; I 368.

<sup>116</sup> Christoph Sigwart, *Logic*, trans. Helen Dendy, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1895), I i. *Logik*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1889, 1893). (1st ed. of vol. 1, 1873; 2nd ed., 1878.)

<sup>117</sup> Hermann Lotze, *Logic*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), §II. *Logik: Drei Bücher vom Denken, vom Untersuchen und vom Erkennen*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1880). (Original edition, 1874.) Whenever possible, I cite by paragraph numbers (§), which are common to the English and German editions.

<sup>118</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §XI.

<sup>119</sup> Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie: Zweiter Band*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1870), 636.

<sup>120</sup> Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Outlines of Logic and Metaphysics*, trans. B. C. Burt (New York: Macmillan, 1896), §2. *Grundriss der Logik und Metaphysik*, 4th ed. (Halle: H. W. Schmidt, 1864). (Original edition, 1841.) For a representative passage in Beneke, see *System der Logik als Kunstlehre des Denken: Erster Theil* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1842), 17–18.

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, Gottlob Frege, *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*, vol. 1 (Jena: H. Pohle, 1893), xv, trans. Michael Beaney in *The Frege Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 202.

<sup>122</sup> Kant, Ak 9:14.

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft* (Königsberg: Unzer, 1825), 173; Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 408–9.



not so much about whether such a distinction could be drawn, but whether this distinction entailed that psychology and logic were independent. Husserl argued that the distinction between descriptive and normative laws was insufficient to protect against psychologism, since the psychologistic logician could maintain, as did Mill, that the science of *correct* reasoning is a branch of psychology, since the laws that describe all thinking surely also apply to the subclass of correct thinking.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, Mill argues, if logic is to characterize the process of correct thinking, it has to draw on an analysis of how human thinking in fact operates.<sup>125</sup>

Mansel argued that the possibility of logical error in no way affects the character of logic as the science of those “mental laws to which every sound thinker is bound to conform.”<sup>126</sup> After all, it is only a contingent fact about us that we can make errors and the logical works written by beings for whom logical laws were in fact natural laws would look the same as ours. Sigwart, while granting that logic is the *ethics* and not the *physics* of thinking,<sup>127</sup> nevertheless argues that taking some kinds of thinking and not others as *normative* can only be justified psychologically – by noting when we experience the “*immediate consciousness* of evident truth.”<sup>128</sup> Mill also thinks that logical laws are grounded in psychological facts: we infer the principle of contradiction, for instance, from the introspectible fact that “Belief and Disbelief are two different mental states, excluding one another.”<sup>129</sup>

For Lotze, the distinction between truth and “untruth” is absolutely fundamental to logic but of no special concern to psychology. Thus psychology can tell us how we come to believe logical laws, but it cannot ground their truth.<sup>130</sup> Frege argued in a similar vein that psychology investigates how humans come to hold a logical law to be true but has nothing to say about the law’s being true.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Erster Teil: Prolegomena zur reinen Logik* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1900), §19. Mill, *Examination*, 359.

<sup>125</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 12–13.

<sup>126</sup> Mansel, *Prolegomena*, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Sigwart, *Logic*, I 20 (*Logik*, I 22).

<sup>128</sup> Sigwart, *Logic*, I §3 (*Logik*, I §3).

<sup>129</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 277. But Mill appears to equivocate. He elsewhere suggests that the principle is merely verbal after all: Mill, “Grote’s Aristotle,” reprinted in vol. 11 of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 499–500. (Compare here *Logic*, 178.) Still elsewhere, he seems agnostic whether the principle is grounded in the innate constitution of our mind: *Examination*, 381.

<sup>130</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §X; §332.

<sup>131</sup> Gottlob Frege, “Logic,” trans. Peter Lond and Roger White in *Posthumous Writings*, eds. Hans Hermes, Friedrich Kambartel, and Friedrich Kaulbach (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 145. “Logik,” in *Nachgelassene Schriften*, eds. Hans Hermes, Friedrich Kambartel, and Friedrich Kaulbach (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1969), 157. See also Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J. L. Austin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), vi. *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik. Eine logisch-mathematische*

Lotze thus supplemented the antipsychologistic arguments arising from the *normativity* of logic with a separate line of argumentation based on the *objectivity* of the domain of logic. For Lotze, the subjective *act* of thinking is distinct from the objective *content* of thought. This content “presents itself as the same self-identical object to the consciousness of others.”<sup>132</sup> Logic, but not psychology, concerns itself with the objective relations among the objective thought contents.<sup>133</sup> Lotze was surely not the first philosopher to insist on an act/object distinction. Herbart had earlier improved on the ambiguous talk of “concepts” by distinguishing among the act of thinking (the *conceiving*), the concept itself (that which is *conceived*), and the real things that fall under the concept.<sup>134</sup> But Lotze’s contribution was to use the act/object distinction to secure the objectivity or sharability of thoughts. He interprets and defends Plato’s doctrine of Ideas as affirming that no thinker *creates* or *makes true* the truths that he thinks.<sup>135</sup>

Like Lotze, Frege associated the confusion of logic with psychology with erasing the distinction between the objective and the subjective.<sup>136</sup> Concepts are not something subjective, such as an idea, because the same concept can be known intersubjectively. Similarly, “we cannot regard thinking as a process which generates thoughts. . . . For do we not say that the same thought is grasped by this person and by that person?”<sup>137</sup> For Lotze, intersubjective thoughts are somehow still *products* of acts of thinking.<sup>138</sup> For Frege, though, a thought exists independently of our thinking – it is “independent of our thinking as such.”<sup>139</sup> Indeed, for Frege any logic that describes the *process* of correct thinking would be psychologistic: logic entirely concerns the most general truths concerning the *contents* (not the acts) of thought.<sup>140</sup>

*Untersuchung über den Begriff der Zahl* (Breslau: W. Koebner, 1884), vi. (Identical paginations in German and English editions.)

<sup>132</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §345.

<sup>133</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §332.

<sup>134</sup> Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Lehrbuch zur Einleitung in die Philosophie*, reprinted in *Johann Friedrich Herbart’s Sämtliche Werke: Erster Band* (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1850), §§34–5. (Original edition, 1813.) Independently, Mill severely criticized what he called “conceptualism” – a position common “from Descartes downwards, and especially from the era of Leibniz and Locke” – for confusing the *act* of judging with the thing judged. See Mill, *Logic*, 87–9.

<sup>135</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §313ff. On this nonmetaphysical reading of Plato, recognizing the sharability and judgment-independence of truth (§314) does not require hypostasizing the contents of thought or confusing the kind of reality they possess (which Lotze influentially called “validity”) with the existence of things in space and time (§316).

<sup>136</sup> Frege, *Foundations*, x.

<sup>137</sup> Frege, *Foundations*, vii, §4. Frege, “Logic,” 137 (*Nachgelassene*, 148–9).

<sup>138</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §345.

<sup>139</sup> Frege, *Frege Reader*, 206 (*Grundgesetze*, I xxiv). Frege, “Logic,” 133 (*Nachgelassene*, 144–5).

<sup>140</sup> Frege, “Logic,” 146 (*Nachgelassene*, 158). Frege, *Frege Reader*, 202 (*Grundgesetze*, I xv).

There are then multiple independent theses that one might call “anti-psychologistic.” One thesis asserts the independence of logic from psychology. Another insists on the distinction between descriptive, psychological laws and normative, logical laws. Another thesis denies that logical laws can be grounded in psychological facts. Yet another thesis denies that logic concerns processes of thinking at all. Still another thesis emphasizes the independence of the truth of thought-contents from acts of holding-true. A stronger thesis maintains the objective existence of thought-contents.

Although Bernard Bolzano’s *Theory of Science* was published in 1837, it was largely unread until the 1890s, when it was rediscovered by some of Brentano’s students.<sup>141</sup> Bolzano emphasized more strongly than any thinker before Frege both that the truth of thought-contents is independent of acts of holding-true and that there are objective thought-contents.<sup>142</sup> A “proposition in itself” is “any assertion that something is or is not the case, regardless whether somebody has put it into words, and regardless even whether or not it has been thought.”<sup>143</sup> It differs both from spoken propositions (which are speech acts) and from mental propositions insofar as the proposition in itself is the *content* of these acts. Propositions and their parts are not real, and they neither exist nor have being; they do not come into being and pass away.<sup>144</sup>

### THE DOCTRINE OF TERMS

For the remainder of this article, we move from consideration of how the various conceptions of logic evolved throughout the century to an overview of some of the logical topics discussed most widely in the period. According to the tradition, a logic text began with a section on *terms*, moved on to a section on those *judgments* or propositions composed of terms, and ended with a section on *inferences*. Many of the works of the century continued to follow this model, and we will follow suit here.

A fundamental debate among nineteenth-century logicians concerned what the most basic elements of logic are. In the early modern period, Arnauld and

<sup>141</sup> Bernard Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, ed. and trans. Rolf George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). The now-standard German edition is Bernard Bolzano, *Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Jan Berg as vols. 11–14 of ser. 1 of *Bernard-Bolzano-Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Eduard Winter, Jan Berg, Friedrich Kambartel, Jaromír Louzil, and Bob van Rootselaar (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1985–2000). Cited by paragraph numbers (§), common to English and German editions. As an example of Bolzano’s belated recognition, see Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, 225–7.

<sup>142</sup> Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, §48 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 11.2: §48).

<sup>143</sup> Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, §19 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 11.1:104).

<sup>144</sup> Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, §19 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 11.1:105).

Nicole had transformed the doctrine of terms into the doctrine of *ideas*.<sup>145</sup> Kant, having distinguished intuitions from concepts, restricts the province of logic to *conceptual representations*.<sup>146</sup> Mill, taking seriously that language is the chief instrument of thinking,<sup>147</sup> begins with a discussion of *names*, distinguishing between general and individual, categorematic and syncategorematic, and connotative and nonconnotative (or denotative) names.<sup>148</sup>

For Mill, the attribute named by the predicate term in a proposition is affirmed or denied of the object(s) named by the subject term.<sup>149</sup> Mill opposes this view to the common British theory that a proposition expresses that the class picked out by the subject is included in the class picked out by the predicate.<sup>150</sup> Though Mill thinks that “there are as many actual classes (either of real or of imaginary things) as there are general names,”<sup>151</sup> he still insists that the use of predicate terms in affirming an attribute of an object is more fundamental and makes possible the formation of classes. The debate over whether a proposition is fundamentally the expression of a relation among classes or a predication of an attribute overlapped with the debate over whether logic should consider terms *extensionally* or *intensionally*.<sup>152</sup> Logicians after Arnauld and Nicole distinguished between the *intension* and the *extension* of a term. The intension (or content) comprises those concepts it contains. The extension of a term is the things contained under it – either its subspecies<sup>153</sup> or the objects falling under it. Hamilton thought that logic could consider judgments both as the inclusion of the extension of the subject concept in the extension of the predicate concept and as the inclusion of the predicate concept in the

<sup>145</sup> Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, trans. Jill Vance Buroker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>146</sup> Kant, *Logic*, §1. Subsequent German “formal” logicians followed Kant, as did the Kantian formal logicians in midcentury Britain. Thus, both Hamilton (*Logic*, I 13, 75, 131) and Mansel (*Prolegomena*, 22, 32) begin their works by distinguishing concepts from intuitions.

<sup>147</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 19–20. Mill’s procedure draws on Whately, who claimed not to understand what a general idea could be if not a name; see Whately, *Elements*, 12–13, 37.

<sup>148</sup> Many of these distinctions had been made earlier by Whately and – indeed – by Scholastics. See Whately, *Elements*, 81.

<sup>149</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 21, 97.

<sup>150</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 94. For an example of the kind of position Mill is attacking, see Whately, *Elements*, 21, 26.

<sup>151</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 122.

<sup>152</sup> Mill’s view actually cuts across the traditional distinction: he thinks that the *intension* of the predicate name is an attribute of the *object* picked out by the subject name. Traditional intensionalists thought that the intension of the predicate term is contained in the intension of the subject term; traditional extensionalists thought that the proposition asserts that the extension of the predicate term includes the extension of the subject term.

<sup>153</sup> See, e.g., Kant, *Logic*, §7–9. In the critical period, when Kant more thoroughly distinguished relations among concepts from relations among objects, Kant began to talk also of *objects* contained under concepts (e.g., *Critique of Pure Reason*, A137/B176).

intension of the subject concept.<sup>154</sup> But, as Mansel rightly objected, if a judgment is synthetic, the subject class is contained in the predicate class without the predicate's being contained in the content of the subject.<sup>155</sup>

Boole self-consciously constructed his symbolic logic entirely extensionally.<sup>156</sup> Though Jevons insisted that the intensional interpretation of terms is logically fundamental,<sup>157</sup> the extensional interpretation won out. Venn summarized the common view when he said that the task of symbolic logic is to find the solution to the following problem: given any number of propositions of various types and containing any number of class terms, find the relations of inclusion or inclusion among each class to the rest.<sup>158</sup>

Frege sharply distinguished singular terms from predicates<sup>159</sup> and later even the referents of proper names from the referents of predicates.<sup>160</sup> In the traditional logic, "Socrates is mortal" and "Humans are mortal" were treated in the same way. Thus, for Kant, both "Socrates" and "Human" express concepts; every subjudgmental component of a judgment is a concept.<sup>161</sup> Frege therefore also departed from the traditional logic in distinguishing the subordination of one concept to another from the subsumption of an object under a concept. This distinction was not made in the Boolean tradition; for Boole, variables always refer to classes, which are thought of as wholes composed of parts.<sup>162</sup> Thus a class being a union of other classes is not distinguished from a class being composed of its elements.

<sup>154</sup> Hamilton, *Lectures*, I 231–2. This position was also defended by Hamilton's student William Thomson, *An Outline of the Necessary Laws of Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: William Pickering, 1849), 189.

<sup>155</sup> Henry Longueville Mansel, "Recent Extensions of Formal Logic," reprinted in *Letters, Lectures, and Reviews*, ed. Henry W. Chandler (London: John Murray, 1873), 71. (Original edition, 1851.)

<sup>156</sup> "What renders logic possible is the existence in our mind of general notions – our ability ... from any conceivable collection of objects to separate by a mental act those which belong to the given class and to contemplate them apart from the rest." Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 4.

<sup>157</sup> Jevons, "Pure Logic," §1–5, 11, 17.

<sup>158</sup> Venn, *Symbolic Logic*, xx.

<sup>159</sup> Gottlob Frege, *Begriffsschrift, eine der arithmetischen nachgebildete Formelsprache des reinen Denkens* (Halle: L. Nebert, 1879), §9, trans. Michael Beaney in *The Frege Reader*. Citations are by paragraph numbers (§), common to the German and English editions, or by page numbers from the original German edition, which are reproduced in the margins of *The Frege Reader*.

<sup>160</sup> Gottlob Frege, "Funktion und Begriff," in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Ignacio Angelelli (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 125–42, trans. Peter Geach and Brian McGuinness as "Function and Concept" in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, ed. Brian McGuinness (New York: Blackwell, 1984).

<sup>161</sup> The Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions is thus not parallel to Frege's concept/object distinction.

<sup>162</sup> Frege points out that the Booleans failed to make this distinction in his paper "Boole's Logical Calculus and the Concept-script," trans. Peter Lond and Roger White in *Posthumous Writings*, 18. *Nachgelassene Schriften*, 19–20. This essay was written in 1880–1. Unknown to Frege, Bolzano had clearly drawn the distinction forty years earlier – see Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, §66.2, §95 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 11.2:105–6, 11.3:38–9).

The traditional doctrine of concepts included a discussion of how concepts are formed. On the traditional abstractionist model, concepts are formed by noticing similarities or differences among particulars and abstracting the concept, as the common element.<sup>163</sup> This model came under severe criticism from multiple directions throughout the century. On the traditional “bottom-up” view, the concept *F* is formed from antecedent representations of particular *F*s, and judgments containing *F* are formed subsequent to the acquisition of the concept. For Frege, the order of priority is reversed: “as opposed to [Boole], I start out with judgments and their contents, and not from concepts. . . . I only allow the formation of concepts to proceed from judgments.”<sup>164</sup> The concepts *4th power* and *4th root of 16* are formed, not by abstraction, but by starting with the judgment “ $2^4 = 16$ ” and replacing in its linguistic expression one or more singular terms by variables. These variables can then be bound by the sign for generality to form the quantified relational expressions that give Frege’s new logic its great expressive power. Since the same judgment can be decomposed in different ways, a thinker can form the judgment “ $2^4 = 16$ ” without noting all of the ways in which the judgment can be decomposed. This in turn explains how the new logic can be epistemically ampliative.<sup>165</sup>

Kant had earlier asserted his own kind of “priority thesis,”<sup>166</sup> and the historical connection between Kant and Frege’s priority principles is a complicated one that well illustrates how philosophical and technical questions became intertwined during the century. For Kant, concepts are essentially predicates of possible judgments, because only a judgment is subject to truth or falsity,<sup>167</sup> and thus it is only in virtue of being a predicate in a judgment that concepts relate to objects.<sup>168</sup> Though Kant never explicitly turned this thesis against the theory of concept formation by abstraction, Hegel rightly noted that implicit within Kantian philosophy is a theory opposed to abstractionism.<sup>169</sup> For Kant, just as concepts are related to objects because they can be combined in judgments, intuitions are related to objects because the manifold contained in an intuition is combined according to a certain rule provided by a concept.<sup>170</sup> Thus, the theory of concept formation by abstraction cannot be true in general: the very representation of particulars in intuition already requires the possession of a concept. This Kantian-inspired Hegelian argument was directed

<sup>163</sup> See, e.g., Kant, *Logic*, §6.

<sup>164</sup> Frege, “Boole’s Calculus,” 16–17 (*Nachgelassene*, 17–19).

<sup>165</sup> Frege, “Boole’s Calculus,” 33–4 (*Nachgelassene*, 36–8). Frege, *Foundations*, §88.

<sup>166</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A68–9/B93–4.

<sup>167</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B141–2.

<sup>168</sup> Kant, Ak 4:475.

<sup>169</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 589 (Werke 12:22).

<sup>170</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A150.

against Hamilton and Mansel in T. H. Green's 1874–5 "Lectures on the Formal Logicians" and against Boolean logic by Robert Adamson.<sup>171</sup> (Indeed, these works imported post-Kantian reflections on logic into Britain, setting the stage for the idealist logics that gained prominence later in the century.)

Hegel added a second influential attack on abstractionism. The procedure of comparing, reflecting, and abstracting to form common concepts does not have the resources to discriminate between essential marks and any randomly selected common feature.<sup>172</sup> Trendelenburg took this argument one step further and claimed that it was not just the theory of concept formation, but also the *structure* of concepts in the traditional logic that was preventing it from picking out explanatory concepts. A concept should "contain the ground of the things falling under it."<sup>173</sup> Thus, the higher concept is to provide the "law" for the lower concept, and – pace Drobisch<sup>174</sup> – a compound concept cannot just be a sum of marks whose structure could be represented using algebraic signs: *human* is not simply *animal* + *rational*.<sup>175</sup>

Lotze extended and modified Trendelenburg's idea. For him, the "organic bond"<sup>176</sup> among the component concepts in a compound concept can be modeled "functionally": the content of the whole concept is some nontrivial function of the content of the component concepts.<sup>177</sup> Concepts formed by *interrelating* component universals such as interdependent variables in a function can be explanatory, then, because the dependence of one thing on another is modeled by the functional dependence of component concepts on one another. Lotze thinks that there are in mathematics kinds of inferences more sophisticated than syllogisms<sup>178</sup> and that it is only in these mathematical inferences that the functional interdependence of concepts is exploited.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Thomas Hill Green, "Lectures on Formal Logicians," in *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1886), 165, 171. Adamson, *History*, 117, 122.

<sup>172</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 588 (Werke 12:21). Again, this argument was imported to Britain much later in the century. See Green, "Lectures," 193; Adamson, *History*, 133–4.

<sup>173</sup> Trendelenburg, *Untersuchungen*, I 18–19.

<sup>174</sup> Moritz Wilhelm Drobisch, *Neue Darstellung der Logik*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1851), ix, §18. Drobisch defended the traditional theory of concept formation against Trendelenburg's attack, occasioning an exchange that continued through the various editions of their works.

<sup>175</sup> Trendelenburg, *Untersuchungen*, I 20. Trendelenburg, "Über Leibnizens Entwurf einer allgemeinen Charakteristik," reprinted in *Historische Beiträge zur Philosophie*, vol. 3 (Berlin: G. Bethge, 1867), 24. (Original edition, 1856.) Trendelenburg thought that his position was Aristotelian. For Aristotle, there is an important metaphysical distinction between a genus and differentia. Yet this distinction is erased when the species-concept is represented, using a commutative operator such as *addition*, as *species* = *genus* + *differentia*.

<sup>176</sup> This is Trendelenburg's Aristotelian language: see Trendelenburg, *Untersuchungen*, I 21.

<sup>177</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §28.

<sup>178</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §106ff.

<sup>179</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §120.

Boolean logic, however, treats concepts as sums and so misses the functionally compound concepts characteristic of mathematics.<sup>180</sup>

Frege is thus drawing on a long tradition – springing ultimately from Kant but with significant additions along the way – when he argues that the abstractionist theory of concept formation cannot account for fruitful or explanatory concepts because the “organic” interconnection among component marks in mathematical concepts is not respected when concepts are viewed as sums of marks.<sup>181</sup> But Frege *was* the first to think of sentences as analyzable using the function/argument model<sup>182</sup> and the first to appreciate the revolutionary potential of the possibility of multiple decompositionality.

Sigwart gave a still more radical objection to abstractionism. He argued that in order to abstract a concept from a set of representations, we would need some principle for grouping together just this set, and in order to abstract the concept *F* as a common element in the set, we would need already to see them as *F*s. The abstractionist theory is thus circular and presupposes that ability to make judgments containing the concept.<sup>183</sup>

### JUDGMENTS AND INFERENCES

The most common objection to Kant’s table of judgments was that he lacked a principle for determining that judgment takes just these forms. Hegel thought of judging as predicating a reflected concept of a being given in sensibility – and so as a relation of thought to being. The truth of a judgment would be the identity of thought and being, of the subject and predicate. Hegel thus tried to explain the completeness of the table of judgments by showing how every form of judgment in which the subject and predicate fail to be completely identical resolves itself into a new form.<sup>184</sup> For Hegel, then, logic acquires systematicity not through reducing the various forms of judgment to one another, but by *deriving* one from another. Other logicians, including those who rejected Hegel’s metaphysics, followed Hegel in trying to derive the various forms from one another.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, I 277ff. (Lotze, *Logik*, 256ff.).

<sup>181</sup> Frege, *Foundations*, §88.

<sup>182</sup> Frege, *Begriffsschrift*, vii.

<sup>183</sup> Sigwart, *Logic*, §40.5. Sigwart thus initiated the widely repeated practice of inverting the traditional organization of logic texts, beginning with a discussion of judgments instead of concepts. Lotze himself thought that Sigwart had gone too far in his objections to abstractionism: Lotze, *Logic*, §8.

<sup>184</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 625–6, 630 (Werke 54–5, 59).

<sup>185</sup> E.g., Lotze, *Logic*, I 59 (Lotze, *Logik*, 70).



British logicians, on the other hand, tended to underwrite the systematicity of logic by *reducing* the various forms of judgment to one common form. Unlike Kant,<sup>186</sup> Whately reduced disjunctive propositions to hypotheticals in the standard way, and he reduced the hypothetical judgment “If  $A$  is  $B$ , then  $X$  is  $Y$ ,” to “The case of  $A$  being  $B$  is a case of  $X$  being  $Y$ .”<sup>187</sup> All judgments become categorical, all reasoning becomes syllogizing, and every principle of inference reducible to Aristotle’s *dictum de omni et nullo*. Mansel was more explicit in reading hypothetical judgments temporally: he interprets “If Caius is disengaged, he is writing poetry” as “All times when Caius is disengaged are times when he is writing poetry.”<sup>188</sup> Mill endorses Whately’s procedure, interpreting “If  $p$  then  $q$ ” as “The proposition  $q$  is a legitimate inference from the proposition  $p$ .”<sup>189</sup> Mill, of course, thought that syllogistic reasoning is really grounded in induction. But in feeling the need to identify one “universal type of the reasoning process,” Mill was at one with Whately, Hamilton, and Mansel, each of whom tried to reduce induction to syllogisms.<sup>190</sup>

Boole notoriously argues that one and the same logical equation can be interpreted either as a statement about classes of things or as a “secondary proposition” – a proposition about other propositions.<sup>191</sup> Let “ $x$ ” represent the class of times in which the proposition  $X$  is true. Echoing similar proposals by his contemporaries, Boole expresses “If  $Y$  then  $X$ ” as “ $y = vx$ ”: “The time in which  $Y$  is true is an indefinite portion of the time in which  $X$  is true.”<sup>192</sup> As Frege pointed out, making the calculus of classes and the calculus of propositions two distinct interpretations of the same equations prevents Boole from analyzing the same sentence using quantifiers and sentential operators simultaneously.<sup>193</sup> Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* gave an axiomatization of truth-functional propositional logic that depends on neither the notion of time nor a calculus of classes. In this, Frege was anticipated by Hugh MacColl.<sup>194</sup> Independently, Peirce axiomatized two-valued truth-functional logic, clearly acknowledging that the material conditional, having no counterfactual meaning, differs from the use of “if” in natural language.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A73–4/B98–99. Later German logicians tended to follow Kant. See, for example, Fries, *Logik*, §32.

<sup>187</sup> Whately, *Elements*, 71, 74–5.

<sup>188</sup> Mansel, *Prolegomena*, 197.

<sup>189</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 83–4.

<sup>190</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 202. Whately, *Elements*, 153. Hamilton, “Recent Publications,” 162. Mansel, *Prolegomena*, 191.

<sup>191</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 160.

<sup>192</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 170.

<sup>193</sup> Frege, “Boole’s Calculus,” 14–15 (*Nachgelassene*, 15–16).

<sup>194</sup> Hugh MacColl, “The Calculus of Equivalent Statements,” *Proceedings of the London Mathematical Society* 9 (1877): 9–20, 177–86.

<sup>195</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, “On the Algebra of Logic: A Contribution to the Philosophy of Notation,” reprinted in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 3:218–19. (Original edition, 1885.)

Among the most discussed and most controversial innovations of the century were Hamilton's and De Morgan's theories of judgments with quantified predicates. In the traditional logic, the quantifier terms "all" and "some" are only applied to the subject term, and so "All *As* are *Bs*" does not distinguish between the case where the *As* are a proper subset of the *Bs* (in Hamilton's language: "All *As* are some *Bs*") and the case where the *As* are coextensive with the *Bs* ("All *As* are all *Bs*"). Now, a distinctive preoccupation of logicians in the modern period was to arrive at systematic methods that would eliminate the need to memorize brute facts about which of the 256 possible cases of the syllogism were valid. A common method was to reduce all syllogisms to the first figure by converting, for example, "All *As* are *Bs*" to "Some *Bs* are *As*."<sup>196</sup> This required students to memorize which judgments were subject to which kinds of conversions. Quantifying the predicate, however, eliminates the distinctions among syllogistic figures and all of the special rules of conversion: all conversion becomes simple – "All *A* is some *B*" is equivalent to "Some *B* is all *A*."<sup>197</sup>

Given the simplification allowed by predicate quantification, Hamilton thought he could reduce all of the syllogistic rules to one general canon.<sup>198</sup> De Morgan rightly argued that some of Hamilton's new propositional forms are semantically obscure,<sup>199</sup> and he independently gave his own system and notation for quantified predicates. (Hamilton then initiated a messy dispute over priority and plagiarism with De Morgan.) In De Morgan's notation, there are symbols for the quantity of terms (parentheses), for the negation of the copula (a dot), and – what was new in De Morgan – for the contrary or complement of a class (lowercase letters). "All *As* are (some) *Bs*" is "*A*)*B*." De Morgan gave rules for the interaction of quantification, class contraries, and copula negation.<sup>200</sup> The validity of syllogisms is demonstrated very easily, by a simple erasure rule: *Barbara* is "*A*)*B*; *B*)*C*; and so *A*)*C*."<sup>201</sup>

In traditional logic, negation was always attached to the copula "is," and it did not make sense to talk – as De Morgan did – of a negated or contrary term.<sup>202</sup> Further departing from tradition, Frege thought of negation as applied to whole sentences and not just to the copula.<sup>203</sup> (Boole, of course, had already

<sup>196</sup> See, e.g., Whately, *Elements*, 61. For an earlier example, see Immanuel Kant, *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures*, in *Theoretical Philosophy: 1755–1770*, eds. and trans. D. Walford and R. Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>197</sup> Hamilton, *Lectures*, II 273.

<sup>198</sup> Hamilton, *Lectures*, II 290–1.

<sup>199</sup> De Morgan, "Logic," 257–8.

<sup>200</sup> Augustus De Morgan, *Syllabus of a Proposed System of Logic*, reprinted in *On the Syllogism*, 157ff. (Original edition, 1860.)

<sup>201</sup> De Morgan, "Syllogism II," 31.

<sup>202</sup> As Mansel correctly pointed out: Mansel, "Recent Extensions," 64.

<sup>203</sup> Frege, *Begriffsschrift*, §7.

effectively introduced negation as a sentential operator: he expressed the negation of  $X$  as “ $\neg x$ .”<sup>204</sup> The introduction of contrary terms led De Morgan to restrict possible classes to a background “universe under consideration.” If the universe is specified (say, as living humans), then if  $A$  is the class of Britons,  $a$  is the class of humans who are not Britons.<sup>205</sup>

De Morgan’s work on relations led him to distinguish between the relation between two terms and the assertion of that relation, thus separating what was often confused in traditional discussions of the function of the copula.<sup>206</sup> But lacking a sign for propositional negation, De Morgan did not explicitly distinguish between negation as a sentential operator and an agent’s denial of a sentence – a mistake not made by Frege.<sup>207</sup>

De Morgan’s logic of relations was one of many examples of a logical innovation hampered by its adherence to the traditional *subject-copula-predicate* form. Although Bolzano was quite clear about the expressive limitations of the traditional logic in other respects, he nevertheless forced all propositions into the triadic form “*subject has predicate*.”<sup>208</sup> In a sense, the decisive move against the *subject-copula-predicate* form was taken by Boole, since an equation can contain an indefinite number of variables, and there is no sense in asking which term is the subject and which is the predicate. Frege went beyond Boole in explicitly recognizing the significance of his break with the subject/predicate analysis of sentences.<sup>209</sup>

De Morgan required all terms in his system (and their contraries) to be non-empty.<sup>210</sup> With this requirement, the following nontraditional syllogism turns out valid: “All  $X$ s are  $Y$ s; all  $Z$ s are  $Y$ s; therefore, some things are neither  $X$ s nor  $Z$ s.”<sup>211</sup> Boole, on the other hand, did not assume that the class symbols in his symbolism be nonempty.<sup>212</sup> The debate over the permissibility of terms with empty extensions dovetailed with longstanding debates over the traditional doctrine that universal affirmative judgments imply particular affirmative

<sup>204</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 168.

<sup>205</sup> See De Morgan, *Formal Logic*, 37. Boole adopted De Morgan’s idea, renaming it a “universe of discourse” (*Laws of Thought*, 42).

<sup>206</sup> De Morgan, “Syllogism IV,” 215. Compare Mill, *Logic*, 87.

<sup>207</sup> Frege, *Begriffsschrift*, §2.

<sup>208</sup> Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, §127 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 12.1:70–1).

<sup>209</sup> Frege, *Begriffsschrift*, vii. Frege’s break with the subject–predicate analysis of sentences also made irrelevant the development of systems of quantified predicates among British logicians.

<sup>210</sup> De Morgan, *Formal Logic*, 127.

<sup>211</sup> De Morgan, “Syllogism II,” 43. This syllogism is valid because – by De Morgan’s requirement that all terms and their contraries be nonempty – there must be some non- $Y$ s, and from the two premises we can infer that the non- $Y$ s cannot be  $X$ s or  $Z$ s. So some things (namely, the non- $Y$ s) are neither  $X$ s nor  $Z$ s.

<sup>212</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 28.

judgments.<sup>213</sup> Herbart denied that the subject term in a judgment “ $A$  is  $B$ ” must exist, since (for example) we can judge that the square circle is impossible; Fries argued that “Some griffins are birds” is false, even though “All griffins are birds” is true.<sup>214</sup> Although Boole himself followed the tradition,<sup>215</sup> later Booleans tended to follow Herbart and Fries.<sup>216</sup> Independently Brentano, in keeping with the “reformed logic” made possible largely by his existential theory of judgment, read the universal affirmative as “There is no  $A$  that is non- $B$ ” and denied that it implied the particular affirmative.<sup>217</sup>

Whately argued that syllogistic was grounded in one principle only, Aristotle’s *dictum de omni et nullo*: “What is predicated, either affirmatively or negatively, of a term distributed, may be predicated in like manner (affirmatively or negatively) of any thing contained under that term.”<sup>218</sup> Hamilton thought that the *dictum* was derivable from the more fundamental law: “The part of the part is the part of the whole.”<sup>219</sup> Mill rejected the *dictum* and identified two principles of the syllogism: “Things which coexist with the same thing, coexist with one another,” and “A thing which coexists with another thing, with which other a third thing does not coexist, is not coexistent with that third thing.” These principles are laws about facts, not ideas, and (he seems to suggest) they are grounded in experience.<sup>220</sup> Mansel argued that the *dictum* could be derived from the more fundamental principles of identity and contradiction, a position taken earlier by Twisten.<sup>221</sup> De Morgan argued that the validity of syllogisms depends on the transitivity and commutativity of the copula. He argues against Mansel that these two properties cannot be derived from the principles of contradiction and identity (which gives reflexivity, not commutativity or transitivity).<sup>222</sup>

<sup>213</sup> For an example of the traditional view, see Whately, *Elements*, 46–7. Bolzano also defended the tradition: *Theory of Science*, §225 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 12.3:57–9).

<sup>214</sup> Herbart, *Lehrbuch*, §53. Fries, *Logik*, 123.

<sup>215</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 61. He represented universal affirmatives as “ $x = \nu y$ ” and particular affirmatives as “ $\nu x = \nu y$ ” with  $\nu$  the symbol for some indefinite selection; given the assumption that  $\nu x$  is always nonzero (*Laws of Thought*, 61) and that  $\nu^2 = \nu$ , the inference holds (*Laws of Thought*, 229). In general, if a logician allowed for terms with empty extensions, then the inference from universal affirmative to particular affirmative would fail. But Boole illustrates that this holds only in general.

<sup>216</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, “On the Algebra of Logic,” reprinted in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 3:114. (Original edition, 1880.) Venn, *Symbolic Logic*, 141ff.

<sup>217</sup> Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A. C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, and L. McAlister, ed. Peter Simons, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), 230; *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, ed. Oskar Kraus, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1924), II 77. (Original edition, 1874.)

<sup>218</sup> Whately, *Elements*, 31.

<sup>219</sup> Hamilton, *Lectures*, I 144–5; compare Kant, *Logic*, §63.

<sup>220</sup> Mill, *Logic*, 178.

<sup>221</sup> Mansel, *Prolegomena*, 189. August Twisten, *Die Logik, insbesondere die Analytik* (Schleswig, 1825), §6.

<sup>222</sup> De Morgan, *Formal Logic*, 50ff.; De Morgan, “Syllogism IV,” 214.

By 1860, De Morgan considered syllogistic to be just one material instantiation of the most general form of reasoning: “ $A$  is an  $L$  of  $B$ ;  $B$  is an  $M$  of  $C$ ; therefore,  $A$  is an  $L$  of an  $M$  of  $C$ .” Nevertheless, De Morgan thought that syllogistic needed completing, not discarding: his logic of relations is the “higher atmosphere of the syllogism.”<sup>223</sup> Hamilton intended his system of quantified predicates to “complete and simplify the old; – to place the keystone in the Aristotelic arch.”<sup>224</sup> Similarly, Venn later argued that Boole’s symbolic logic generalizes and develops the common logic, and he advocates retaining the old syllogistic logic in the classroom.<sup>225</sup> (This attitude contrasts sharply with the contempt for syllogistic shown by German logicians in the generation of Schleiermacher and Hegel.)

Perhaps the deepest and most innovative contribution to the theory of inference was Bolzano’s theory of deducibility, based on the method of idea variation that he introduced in his *Theory of Science*. The propositions  $C_p \dots, C_n$  are *deducible* from  $P_p \dots, P_m$  with respect to some idea  $i$  if every substitution of an idea  $j$  for  $i$  that makes  $P_p \dots, P_m$  true also makes  $C_p \dots, C_n$  true.<sup>226</sup> If we restrict our attention to those inferences where the conclusions are deducible with respect to all logical ideas,<sup>227</sup> we isolate a class of “formal” inferences. Bolzano is thus able to pick out all of the logically correct inferences in a fundamentally different way from his contemporaries: he does not try to reduce all possible inferences to one general form, and he does not need to ground the validity of deductions in an overarching principle, like Aristotle’s *dictum* or the principle of identity. Bolzano admits, however, that he has no exhaustive or systematic list of logical ideas – so his idea is not fully worked out.<sup>228</sup>

## LOGIC, LANGUAGE, AND MATHEMATICS

Debate in Germany over the necessity or possibility of a new logical symbolism centered around Leibniz’s idea of a “universal characteristic,” which was discussed in a widely read paper by Trendelenburg. As Trendelenburg describes the project, Leibniz wanted a language in which, first, the parts of the symbols for a compound concept would be symbols for the parts of the concept itself, and, second, the truth or falsity of any judgment could be determined by calculating.<sup>229</sup> To develop such a language would require first isolating all

<sup>223</sup> De Morgan, “Syllogism IV,” 241.

<sup>224</sup> Hamilton, *Lectures*, II 251.

<sup>225</sup> Venn, *Symbolic Logic*, xxvii.

<sup>226</sup> Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, §155 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 12.1:169–86).

<sup>227</sup> Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, §223 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 12.3:47–9).

<sup>228</sup> Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, §148.2 (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 12.1:141).

<sup>229</sup> Trendelenburg, “Leibnizens Entwurf,” 6, 18.

of the simple concepts or categories.<sup>230</sup> Trendelenburg thought the project was impossible. First, it is not possible to isolate the fundamental concepts of a science before the science is complete, and so the language could not be a tool of scientific discovery.<sup>231</sup> Second, Leibniz's characterization of the project presupposes that all concepts can be analyzed as sums of simple concepts, and all reasoning amounts to determining whether one concept is contained in another. Thus, Leibniz's project is subject to all of the objections, posed by Trendelenburg and others, to the abstractionist theory of concept formation and the theory of concepts as sums of marks.<sup>232</sup>

The title of Frege's 1879 book – *Begriffsschrift* or “Concept-script” – is taken from Trendelenburg's essay.<sup>233</sup> In his 1880 review, Schröder argues that Frege's title does not correspond to the content of the book.<sup>234</sup> A “*Begriffsschrift*,” or universal characteristic, would require a complete analysis of concepts into basic concepts or “categories” and a proof that the content of every concept can be formed from these categories by a small number of operations. To Schröder, Frege's project is closer to a related Leibnizian project, the development of a *calculus ratiocinator*, a symbolic calculus for carrying out deductive inferences but not for expressing content. In reply, Frege argued that his *begriffsschrift* does differ from Boolean logic in aiming to be both a *calculus ratiocinator* and a universal characteristic.<sup>235</sup> To carry out his logicist project, Frege needs to isolate the axioms of arithmetic, show that these axioms are logical truths and that every concept and object referred to in these axioms is logical, define arithmetical terms, and finally derive the theorems of arithmetic from these axioms and definitions. Since these proofs need to be fully explicit and ordinary language is unacceptably imprecise, it is clear that a logically improved language is needed for expressing the content of arithmetic.<sup>236</sup> Moreover, in strongly rejecting the traditional view that concepts are sums of marks and that all inferring is syllogizing, Frege was answering the objections to Leibniz's project earlier articulated by Trendelenburg.

<sup>230</sup> Trendelenburg, “Leibnizens Entwurf,” 20.

<sup>231</sup> Trendelenburg, “Leibnizens Entwurf,” 25.

<sup>232</sup> Trendelenburg, “Leibnizens Entwurf,” 24.

<sup>233</sup> See Trendelenburg, “Leibnizens Entwurf,” 4.

<sup>234</sup> Ernst Schröder, “Review of Frege's *Begriffsschrift*,” trans. Terrell Ward Bynum in *Conceptual Notation and Related Articles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). (Original edition: “Rezension von Gottlob Frege, *Begriffsschrift*,” *Zeitschrift für Mathematik und Physik* 25 [1880]: 81–94.)

<sup>235</sup> Frege, “Boole's Calculus,” 12 (*Nachgelassene*, 13).

<sup>236</sup> Gottlob Frege, “On the Scientific Justification of a Conceptual Notation,” trans. Terrell Ward Bynum in *Conceptual Notation and Related Articles*, 85. (Original edition: “Über die wissenschaftliche Berechtigung einer Begriffsschrift,” *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 81 [1882]: 50–1.)

Schröder's 1877 *Der Operationskreis des Logikkalküls* opens by arguing that Boole had fulfilled Leibniz's dream of a logical calculus.<sup>237</sup> Later he argued explicitly that his algebra of logic was a necessary and significant step in the development of a universal characteristic or "pasigraphy."<sup>238</sup> Venn, on the other hand, argued that the symbolic logic developed since Boole differs from Leibniz's universal characteristic "as language should and does differ from logic." In symbolic logic, each symbol is a variable standing for any class whatsoever; in a universal characteristic, the symbols refer to definite classes.<sup>239</sup>

Frege's thesis that arithmetic is a branch of logic<sup>240</sup> was but one contribution in the long debate about the relation between logic and mathematics. An old debate was whether mathematical proofs – specifically, geometrical proofs – could be cast in syllogistic form. Euler had thought so; Schleiermacher did not.<sup>241</sup> Thomas Reid had argued that an inference involving a judgment with three terms – such as an instance of the transitivity of equality – could not be captured in syllogisms. Hamilton, in his 1846 note in his edition of Reid's works, argues that one can express transitivity of equality syllogistically as "What are equal to the same are equal to each other; A and C are equal to the same (B); therefore, A and C are equal to each other."<sup>242</sup> As De Morgan rightly noted, this syllogism does not reduce the transitivity of equality; it presupposes it.<sup>243</sup>

Both De Morgan and Boole wanted to make logic symbolic, in a way modeled on mathematics. Mansel accused both Boole and De Morgan of treating logic as an application of mathematics.<sup>244</sup> This is a confusion, he contended, because logic is formal and mathematics is material. Boole, unlike De Morgan, took from algebra specific symbols, laws, and methods. Nevertheless, Boole argued

<sup>237</sup> Schröder, *Operationskreis*, iii.

<sup>238</sup> Ernst Schröder, *Vorlesungen über die Algebra der Logik*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1890), 95. Ernst Schröder, "On Pasigraphy: Its Present State and the Pasigraphic Movement in Italy," *Monist* 9 (1898): 44–62.

<sup>239</sup> Venn, *Symbolic Logic*, 109.

<sup>240</sup> Frege, *Grundgesetze*, 1.

<sup>241</sup> Leonard Euler, *Letters of Euler on Different Subjects in Natural Philosophy: Addressed to a German Princess: with Notes and a Life of Brewster: Containing a Glossary of Scientific Terms with Additional Notes*, by John Griscom, trans. Henry Hunter (New York: Harper, 1833), 1:354. (Original edition, 1768–72.) Schleiermacher denied that syllogisms are sufficient for geometrical proofs, since the essential element is the drawing of the additional lines in the diagram: *Dialektik*, 287.

<sup>242</sup> Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, reprinted in *The Works of Thomas Reid, D.D. Now Fully Collected, with Selections from His Unpublished Letters*, with preface, notes, and supplementary dissertations by William Hamilton (Edinburgh: Maclachlan, Stewart, 1846), 702. (Reid's *Essays* first appeared in 1788.) Hamilton's argument appears as an editorial footnote on the same page.

<sup>243</sup> De Morgan, "On the Syllogism II," 67.

<sup>244</sup> Mansel, "Recent Extensions," 47. Mansel was directing his argument against Boole's *Laws of Thought* and De Morgan's *Formal Logic*.

that even though logic's "ultimate forms and processes are mathematical," it is only established a posteriori that the algebra of logic can be interpreted indifferently as an algebra of classes or propositions, or again as an algebra of the quantities 0 and 1.<sup>245</sup>

Jevons accused Boole of, in essence, beginning with self-evident logical notions, transforming them into a symbolism analogous to the algebra of the magnitudes 0 and 1, manipulating the equations as if they were about quantities, and then interpreting them as logical inferences – with no justification save the fact that they seem to work out in the end.<sup>246</sup> But this process gets the dependency backward: logic, being purely intensional (or qualitative), is presupposed by the science of number (or quantity), since numbers are composed of qualitatively identical but logically distinct units.<sup>247</sup> For Venn, mathematics and symbolic logic are best thought of as two branches of one language of symbols, characterized by a few combinatorial laws. It would be acceptable to think of logic as a branch of mathematics, as long as one understands mathematics – as Boole did – to be "the science of the laws and combinations of symbols."<sup>248</sup>

Lotze severely criticized Boole for justifying his method on the basis of "rash and misty analogy drawn from the province of mathematics."<sup>249</sup> With respect to the relation between the two disciplines, Lotze emphasized that "all calculation is a kind of thought, that the fundamental concepts and principles of mathematics have their systematic place in logic."<sup>250</sup> Though some commentators have seen this claim as a forerunner of Frege's logicism,<sup>251</sup> Lotze means by this something more modest, and yet still very significant. Lotze is advocating that logicians analyze the distinctive kinds of conceptual structures and inferences found in mathematics; such an analysis shows, Lotze thinks, that mathematics outstrips the expressive capacity of syllogistic. Lotze identified three kinds of mathematical inferences irreducible to syllogisms: "inference by substitution," "inference by proportion," and "inference from constitutive equations."<sup>252</sup>

<sup>245</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 12; 37.

<sup>246</sup> Jevons, "Pure Logic," §202.

<sup>247</sup> Jevons, "Pure Logic," §6; §§185–6.

<sup>248</sup> Venn, *Symbolic Logic*, xvi–ii.

<sup>249</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, I 277–98, especially 278 (*Logik*, 256–69, especially 256).

<sup>250</sup> Lotze, "Logic," §18.

<sup>251</sup> Hans Sluga, *Gottlob Frege* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 57. Sluga, "Frege: The Early Years," in *Philosophy in History: Essays in the Historiography of Philosophy*, eds. Richard Rorty, Jerome B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 343–4. Gottfried Gabriel has argued for a similar conclusion; see his "Objektivität: Logik und Erkenntnistheorie bei Lotze und Frege," in Hermann Lotze, *Logik: Drittes Buch. Vom Erkennen*, ed. Gottfried Gabriel (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989), ix–xxxvi.

<sup>252</sup> Lotze, *Logic*, §§105–19.



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## SOME DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF MATHEMATICS, 1790–1870

JANET FOLINA

Introductions to the philosophy of mathematics rarely focus on the period 1790–1870, if they mention it at all. Aside from Mill's empiricist program, what was happening in the philosophy of mathematics between Kant and Frege? Certainly there were crucial *mathematical* developments. For example, non-Euclidean geometry was discovered in the 1830s, and this paved the way for later conventionalist and formalist philosophies of mathematics such as those offered by Poincaré and Hilbert. In addition, the rigorization of analysis during our period was an important precedent to logicism, a philosophical program espoused by Frege, Dedekind, and Russell just after 1870. But where is the influential philosophy?

Of course, there were philosophers, so there was also philosophy of mathematics. One approach to this period would be to survey what philosophers such as Hegel, Herbart, Fries, Mill, and Comte said about mathematics. However, few of these authors are known for their contributions to philosophy of mathematics, with the notable exception of Mill. Moreover, most of this philosophical work seems far removed from the revolutionary developments in mathematics. On the other hand, entwined in the mathematical developments are crucial and fascinating philosophical arguments. In fact, it is precisely in its close connection to mathematical developments that the relevant philosophy is so exciting, for it shows that the border between mathematics and its philosophy is both permeable and dynamic. Philosophical issues arise *in* mathematics, and mathematicians deal with them, explicitly and implicitly, in their creative work and in their teaching. Furthermore, how the philosophical issues are treated affects mathematics.

In keeping with current treatments of twentieth-century philosophy of mathematics, which focus on mathematicians such as Frege, Dedekind, Hilbert, and Brouwer, this chapter is oriented toward the philosophical views of practicing mathematicians between 1790 and 1870. In particular, it focuses on the philosophical issues that influenced the crucial mathematical developments

during this period. For reasons of space, this sketch will confine itself to philosophy's impact on three main areas of mathematics that were revolutionized during our period: geometry, algebra, and analysis. Of course, a book could be written about most of the issues mentioned here, and I omit many important areas of mathematics such as projective geometry and group theory, as well as many important, and philosophically interesting, mathematicians. I simply hope to convey some of the interest and excitement of the philosophy of mathematics during this underappreciated period.

In addition to exhibiting the dynamic boundary between mathematics and philosophy, two main theses will be defended. First, the period in question is mathematically liberating. The dominant philosophical debate is realist-antirealist, with the antirealists defending more conservative mathematical practices. For example, in algebra a major concern was the meaning, or reference, of negative and imaginary numbers. The idea here seems to be that mathematical truth presupposes some relatively fixed content. In this case, the question was whether or not the idea of "number" could be expanded to include new kinds of number that did not seem to denote any *quantity*. The more conservative arguments reveal a concept of mathematical truth anchored, and limited, by philosophical requirements of meaning and reference. The more liberal side, arguing for less constrained methods, presupposes a less metaphysical conception of truth. Of course, the liberals "won" in our period, and we now think nothing of negative and imaginary numbers.

Second, I wish to show that essential to the progress in all three domains is a greater emphasis on logic – in the methods of mathematics, in the definitions of the basic mathematical concepts, and in the emerging philosophical accounts of mathematical truth. In analysis, for example, Bolzano used logical relationships to determine what counts as a proper ground, or proof, for a given result, and this resulted in proofs that we now regard as more rigorous. (Though the term "logic" is here used in roughly its current sense, the mathematicians in question did not, of course, possess this concept. It should be clear that in these and similar instances terms are being used to sketch a rational reconstruction rather than a pure history.) In geometry and algebra, logic was used in a slightly different way. The idea of logical possibility was used to investigate new structures and to justify them by proving them consistent. Algebra was liberated because its concepts and techniques were eventually treated from the perspective of logical possibility. And of course non-Euclidean geometry was justified by proving it logically consistent (provided that Euclidean geometry is). In general, then, we see both the liberation and rigorization of mathematics tied to a greater emphasis on logic.

Mathematical progress in our three areas thus occurred when the concept of mathematical truth in the domain was more closely aligned with the techniques and concepts of logic.

## GEOMETRY

Geometry provides the most obvious example of significant change during our period in both mathematics and its philosophy. Whether people argued for it or against it, Kant's philosophy of mathematics had enormous influence in the nineteenth century (and beyond). But by the mid-1800s developments in geometry seemed to conflict with Kant's account. According to Kant, space is an a priori intuition, and Euclidean geometry is more or less the theory that investigates its properties. By "a priori intuition" Kant meant that there is a common form of all human experience, determined by the nature of our minds independently of the particular, and various, empirical contents. His more general argument for the existence of synthetic a priori knowledge is meant to defend both metaphysics and the significance of the exact sciences against Hume and treats geometry as a paradigm case.

According to Kant, geometrical knowledge is a priori, since no particular experiences are required in order to justify it. Geometric proofs presuppose only logic plus the axioms, postulates, and definitions. Furthermore, the axioms and postulates seem to force themselves on us universally and necessarily, two signs of apriority. Despite its a priori status, geometry also seemed to have "real" synthetic content owing to the fact that we appear unable to justify geometric theorems by mere reflection on, and analysis of, the basic concepts involved. Instead we must appeal to some general "constructionist" features of space in geometric proofs, such as the indefinite extendability of line segments – features that are guaranteed by the postulates and axioms. This accounts for the synthetic content of geometry while not violating its apriority. Since space is part of the a priori form of experience, appealing to general spatial facts in a proof does not involve one in an a posteriori justification. Yet owing to the fact that space is an intuition, our knowledge of the properties of space is synthetic. Thus geometry is synthetic and a priori.

Whatever the weaknesses of Kant's theory of the synthetic a priori, he solved an important puzzle about mathematics. In one great insight he accounted for the apparent necessity of mathematics along with its apparent significance, or real content. This is no small achievement, and perhaps it explains the appeal many philosophers of mathematics continue to find in Kant's basic picture of the relationship between mathematics and the mind.



Though widely influential, Kant's conception was challenged by the mathematical work of Gauss, Bolyai, Lobachevsky, and Riemann. The development of non-Euclidean geometries and the later proofs of their (relative) consistency induced philosophers to reconceptualize geometry and its philosophical status. The story is well known, but it leads to a crucial revolution in the philosophy of mathematics in the nineteenth century.

### *Historical Sketch of the Development of Non-Euclidean Geometry*

It all revolves around the parallel postulate, of which there are many logically equivalent forms. One of the most common is Playfair's version, which says: Given a line and any point external to the line, there is one and only one line through the point and parallel to the given line in the same plane. It is well known that the parallel postulate was long regarded as problematic. It seemed less intuitive and less immediate than the other Euclidean axioms and postulates. Substitutes, however, were either inadequate or (nearly) equivalent to the original – so that no logical or epistemological ground was gained.

The first real steps toward non-Euclidean geometries were taken by people who were actually trying to defend Euclidean geometry as absolutely true. Rather than finding a more palatable version of the parallel postulate, the new aim was to show it is unnecessary – by showing it is a logical consequence of the other axioms and postulates. If the parallel postulate is a logical consequence of the other postulates, which *are* regarded as immediately evident and certain, then it would inherit this certitude. In 1733 Saccheri attempts this by negating the parallel postulate and trying to derive a contradiction from the negated postulate in conjunction with the rest of the Euclidean axioms and postulates. This constitutes an important methodological step, as it appears to be the first systematic study of the logical consequences of the negated parallel postulate. Furthermore, it is exactly this move that the originators of non-Euclidean geometry replicated.

The Euclidean parallel postulate entails that all triangles have interior angles that sum to two right angles. Saccheri considered two alternate hypotheses – the hypothesis of the obtuse angle and the hypothesis of the acute angle. The obtuse angle hypothesis entails that the sum of the interior angles of any triangle is greater than two right angles; and the acute angle hypothesis entails the opposite, that the sum of the interior angles of any triangle is less than two right angles. Saccheri's aim was to show that each of these alternative hypotheses leads to a contradiction. By assuming that lines are infinite in length Saccheri showed that the obtuse angle hypothesis was inconsistent. But he had a much harder time with that of the acute angle, conjuring a contradiction after

proving what were actually to become some results of non-Euclidean geometry. As Eves observes, if Saccheri had not been so determined to “derive” a contradiction here, he would have gone down in history as one of the great innovators in mathematics – a discoverer of non-Euclidean geometry.<sup>1</sup> Despite this shortcoming, it is important to see that what he did – negate a postulate and study the consequences of the resulting structure with logic – was an important step in both the development of non-Euclidean geometry and the philosophical school of formalism that developed in its light.<sup>2</sup> Two other well-known mathematicians, Lambert and Legendre, tried in similar ways to show the absurdity of the negations of the Euclidean parallel postulate. Lambert is thought to have made some progress over Saccheri.<sup>3</sup> With Saccheri he aimed to derive a contradiction from the supposition of the acute angle hypothesis and instead derived some of the “paradoxical” results of non-Euclidean geometry. Unlike Saccheri, however, he recognized that though counterintuitive, the results were not inconsistent; nor did he argue that they were mathematically impossible. In their attempts to justify the Euclidean parallel postulate Lambert and Legendre were trying to show that it was logically necessary, that is, that non-Euclidean geometry was inconsistent. Though, of course, like Saccheri, they too failed, all three used logic to derive the odd results “repugnant to the notion of the straight line”<sup>4</sup> that later became part of the theory of non-Euclidean geometry.

It may seem somewhat ironic that these attempts to support Euclidean geometry used a method that was exactly replicated by the discoverers of non-Euclidean geometry. Since they were using logical impossibility to try to show mathematical falsity, it is but a small step to conceive mathematical truth as more closely aligned with logical possibility. It is unlikely, however, that Saccheri, Lambert, and Legendre held a revolutionary conception of mathematical truth as determined by logical possibility. They were simply trying to eliminate the need for a separate parallel postulate in order to avoid the worries about its truth and lack of self-evidence. Nevertheless, their work constitutes a step toward a stronger connection between mathematical truth and logic.

The next step toward the modern conception is associated with the names Gauss, Bolyai, and Lobachevsky. Gauss was the first to propose (in letters and

<sup>1</sup> Howard Eves, *Great Moments in Mathematics (After 1650)* (Washington, D.C.: Mathematical Association of America, 1981), 69.

<sup>2</sup> The preceding sketch follows Eves, *Great Moments in Mathematics*.

<sup>3</sup> Johann Heinrich Lambert, “Theory of Parallel Lines” (1786), excerpted in *From Kant to Hilbert*, ed. William Ewald (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 158–67; see also Ewald’s introductory note to Lambert.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Gray, “The Discovery of Non-Euclidean Geometry,” in *Studies in the History of Mathematics*, ed. Esther Phillips (Washington, D.C.: Mathematical Association of America, 1987), 43.

notes) the independence of the parallel postulate and the empirical status of geometry. He even came up with names for the new discipline: first “anti-Euclidean geometry” then “astral geometry” and finally “non-Euclidean geometry.”<sup>5</sup> But he never published his research on it. He feared negative reactions from his colleagues and wanted to have convincing mathematical arguments before publishing anything. (His famous phrase is “I fear the cry of the Boeotians if I were to express my opinion *completely*.”)<sup>6</sup> By the time Gauss was gaining the required confidence, however, he learned of Bolyai’s manuscript and it appears that he thereby felt no need to publish his own work.

Though Gauss never published his research on non-Euclidean geometry, he was only one step removed from both Bolyai and Lobachevsky, and it is tantalizing to speculate on the intellectual debt he is owed. As early as 1799 Gauss was sharing with Bolyai’s father some fairly revolutionary thoughts about his work on parallels. He claims to make progress, but he is clearly frustrated by his inability to “prove” that Euclidean geometry can be rigorously defended, and he even mentions his doubt in its truth.<sup>7</sup> An obvious question is how much of Gauss’s work did the father pass along to J. Bolyai, but there is no clear evidence for substantial influence.

Bolyai published only one work on non-Euclidean geometry – an appendix to a book written by his father. It was really Lobachevsky who, unknown to most of the world at the time, provided the first systematic treatment of non-Euclidean geometry. Lobachevsky studied under Bartels, who was Gauss’s friend and correspondent. Owing to Gauss’s caution regarding his own research, and the absence of the subject of non-Euclidean geometry from the known letters, it is again regarded as unlikely that Bartels, and thus Lobachevsky, knew much about Gauss’s positive work on non-Euclidean geometry.<sup>8</sup> Still, the circumstantial evidence in favor of some crucial influence is strong.<sup>9</sup> Many people were trying at the time to derive Euclid’s parallel postulate and failing. Few were concluding with Gauss – as early as 1799 – that Euclidean geometry might not even be empirically, no less mathematically, true. The point is that both Bolyai and Lobachevsky had to be convinced already that non-Euclidean geometry was mathematically possible, that Euclidean geometry was not forced on us in Kant’s or any other sense, in order to do the work they

<sup>5</sup> See Roberto Bonola, *Non-Euclidean Geometry*, trans. Horatio Scott Carslaw (New York: Dover, 1955), 67; and Carl Friedrich Gauss, Letter to Schumacher (1831), in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 302–5.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Bessel (1829), in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 301.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Wolfgang von Bolyai (1799), in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 299.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Gray, *Ideas of Space, Euclidean, Non-Euclidean and Relativistic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 48; Bonola, *Non-Euclidean Geometry*, 92.

<sup>9</sup> See Ewald’s introduction, “Gauss on Non-Euclidean Geometry,” in *From Kant to Hilbert*, for support in favor of influence.

did. Perhaps Gauss's philosophical views, if not his mathematical work, were critical to these developments.

The full philosophical impact of the work in geometry took an even further step: that of proving that the alternative "Lobachevskian" geometry was consistent. Though Gauss, Bolyai, and Lobachevsky all believed that the non-Euclidean system was consistent, and though they never encountered any contradictions in their work, this did not mean that there were no contradictions. Showing this required a new generation with an even more modern point of view. The idea, found by Beltrami (and promoted by others, including Helmholtz, Klein, and Poincaré), was to provide a relative consistency proof, that is, to show that non-Euclidean geometry is consistent provided Euclidean is. Since everyone believed Euclidean geometry to be consistent (even if not the only possibility), that would show that non-Euclidean geometry was consistent, too. The method was to provide a Euclidean interpretation of non-Euclidean geometry.

### *Philosophical Ramifications*

Even after non-Euclidean geometry was proved consistent, not everyone immediately gave up Kant's conception of mathematics as synthetic a priori. While Kant connected the a priori to universality and necessity, the necessity involved was not logical necessity. It was closer to epistemological, or metaphysical, necessity. (This is why the work of Saccheri and others, in more closely connecting mathematical [geometric] truth to logical possibility, was such a crucial step.) Kant also distinguished between real possibility and logical possibility. Thus, Kantians could quite easily accommodate the consistency of non-Euclidean geometry. That it is logically possible does not mean it is really possible – does not mean it describes a field of possibilities that beings like us could really experience. That is, although Euclidean geometry is not the only logically possible geometry, it might still be a priori imposed by the nature of our minds. It might thus be the only mathematically true geometry. In fact, though his work advanced the cause of non-Euclidean geometry, Beltrami's aim was quite the opposite. Beltrami argued that non-Euclidean geometry was reducible to Euclidean by showing that the latter can be used to interpret (or model, as we would now say) at least two-dimensional Lobachevskian geometry. As Coffa points out, this supports, rather than challenges, the Kantian conception of Euclidean geometry as epistemically and mathematically privileged.<sup>10</sup> The mere existence of consistent alternatives does not overthrow

<sup>10</sup> J. Alberto Coffa, *The Semantic Tradition from Kant to Carnap* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 48–9.

the Kantian philosophy of geometry, nor the view that Euclidean geometry is the a priori true one out of a number of logical possibilities.

But something else does push us closer in this direction. Helmholtz (and later Poincaré) argued, for example, that non-Euclidean geometry is not merely consistent. It is, in fact, a real contender for the best interpretation of our experience, or at least our science. Helmholtz argued that it is possible to envision a series of experiences that would induce us to accept non-Euclidean geometry as true. In the light of this, he argued specifically for empiricism about geometry.<sup>11</sup> If which geometry seems true depends on which experiences we have, then the general features of space seem not a priori but empirical.

This was also the position famously urged by Riemann in his *Habilitationsvortrag*.<sup>12</sup> Gregory Nowak argues that though Riemann was a mathematician, the main purpose of this work was philosophical: to argue that Kant was wrong about geometry.<sup>13</sup> Speaking to an audience that included Gauss, Riemann argued that the qualitative features of space are distinguishable from metric features by conceiving of manifolds without metric properties and on which various metric systems can be imposed. This was meant to show that metric properties do not follow from the concept of space or extension and thus require experience.

In fairness to Kant, this is not so much a refutation as a change of focus. For Kant, space is not a concept but an intuition. Though, of course, we have a concept of space, I take Kant's slogan here to mean that our knowledge of space depends on what we can justify from our intuition. So the intuition of space has epistemic power and is prior to any concept. Riemann's argument that metric properties do not follow from the concept of space does not directly refute Kant. Kant would not have disputed that the axioms determining metric properties must go beyond the mere concept of space or extension. But whereas for the new geometers metric properties are empirical issues, for Kant they are matters concerning the a priori form of experience. Synthetic content is required by both conceptions. Riemann's argument presupposes, more than justifies, a new conception of mathematics: that mathematics is essentially a conceptual, rather than an intuitive, activity. His view is that mathematicians explore logical connections between concepts: there is no logical connection

<sup>11</sup> For example, see Hermann von Helmholtz, "The Origin and Meaning of Geometrical Axioms" (1876), in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 663–89.

<sup>12</sup> Georg Friedrich Bernhard Riemann, "On the Hypotheses Which Lie at the Foundation of Geometry" (1868), in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 652–61.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory Nowak, "Riemann's Habilitationsvortrag and the Synthetic a priori Status of Geometry," in *The History of Modern Mathematics*, vol. 1, eds. David Rowe and John McCleary (New York: Academic Press, 1989), 19.

between the concept of space and physical space, so experience alone can choose between the various options provided by mathematics.

Empiricism about geometry had, of course, been brewing for a while. As mentioned previously, Gauss hinted at it as early as 1799, and the detachment of analysis from geometry, which begins late in the eighteenth century (see “Analysis,” later in this chapter), is driven in part by concerns about the “impure” empirical status of geometry. If geometry is empirical, and if analysis proofs appeal to geometry, then analysis would inherit this empirical status. But it is worth noting that this geometric empiricism, entwined with the mathematical work of geometers, is very different from Mill’s classic version.

Mill was an empiricist about mathematics because he was an empiricist about all significant knowledge. His empiricism was not motivated by worries about the status of Euclidean geometry. It probably was not influenced at all by the then-recent work on non-Euclidean geometry on the Continent. He was an empiricist about arithmetic and indeed logic as well – views that were famously ridiculed later by Frege.<sup>14</sup> So unlike the empiricism of Helmholtz and Riemann, which focused on geometry (and, in particular, on the question of which geometry is true of the physical world), Mill’s empiricism was global and for more general reasons.

Mill accepted half of Kant’s dilemma and rejected the other half. He agreed with Kant that mathematical knowledge must be synthetic because it is nontrivial. But he disagreed with Kant on the necessity of mathematics. Mathematics may appear to be necessary owing to the significant role of deduction in it. But it is not in fact necessary, for mathematical theorems can only be as necessary as the axioms from which they are deduced. And mathematical axioms are not themselves necessary; nor are they known with certainty or apriority. They are mere inductive truths.

In fact, in good empiricist fashion, Mill rejected the whole category of the synthetic a priori. He was out to show that intuition was no more needed in mathematics than in ethics. In some ways he thus shares a surprising kinship with the later logicians (who, of course, savaged him). With Russell he saw not only mathematics, but also logic, as synthetic. With Frege he viewed both mathematics and logic as on a par with the rest of science, though more general, or universal, than the other natural sciences. In support of Mill, his vision of scientific knowledge is seamless, for he rejects the Kantian theory of the synthetic a priori outright. In contrast, Frege views logic and mathematics both as continuous with the rest of the sciences and as distinct in that they are a priori.

<sup>14</sup> Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884), trans. J. L. Austin (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1980).

Frege also famously accepts Kant's view that geometry (unlike logic and arithmetic) is synthetic a priori and requires intuition.

In light of Mill's consistency, Frege's scathing criticisms may seem unfair. Indeed, recent Mill champions have argued both that Mill's philosophy of mathematics has more going for it than formerly thought<sup>15</sup> and that given the right rational reconstruction, Mill's philosophy of mathematics is both naturalist and correct.<sup>16</sup> I cannot comment here on how much of Mill there is in these reconstructions, nor on how empiricist either reconstruction is. But as far as what Mill actually *said*, rather than what he might have said, or meant, I think he rather deserved much of the criticism he later received.

Mill certainly seems to be a straightforward (if extremely thoroughgoing) empiricist about mathematics. On thinking and inferring, he believed that "all inference is from particulars to particulars."<sup>17</sup> We may seem to infer from a general proposition to a particular, such as in, All humans are mortal, Socrates is human, So Socrates is mortal. But for Mill, a general proposition is just a "note" that summarizes and depends on individual observations, both observed and "unforeseen" cases. "The mortality of John, Thomas and others, is, after all, the whole evidence we have for the mortality of the Duke of Wellington. Not one iota is added to the proof by interpolating a general proposition."<sup>18</sup> It is probably true that inductive evidence is usually behind a general claim, and inductive evidence boils down to particular observations. But the general claim does seem useful, for it provides the reason we make the inference to the new case: because it is one of the "unforeseen" cases to which we inferred the property in question. Mill thinks that such inferences are at bottom based only on association and resemblance and that even babies make such associations without inferring to a general proposition such as "fire burns."<sup>19</sup> But why is inference to "unforeseen" cases not a true generalization? And why would Mill think that inferences based on association (such as resemblance) are particular? If anything, to be justificatory, inference by association presupposes a higher-level (innate?) general rule such as that things that resemble each other tend to have similar properties.

Mill's attacks on apriorism in geometry follow a more tractable route and do not specifically depend on his idiosyncratic view that general propositions

<sup>15</sup> John Skorupski (ed.), *John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Philip Kitcher, "Mill, Mathematics, and the Naturalist Tradition," in Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, 57–111; Kitcher, *The Nature of Mathematical Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic* (1872), ed. John Robson, 8th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), bk. II, chap. III, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. III, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. III, 3.

are eliminable. Geometry's appearance of apriority is a mere illusion, based on the idea that its subject matter is imaginary objects. But there actually are no geometric objects per se. There are no things that exactly satisfy the geometric definitions of "point," "line," "equilateral triangle," and so on. Our ideas of such things are extracted from our experiences of physical (imperfect) instantiations of them. Consonant with this source of our ideas, geometric propositions are about the physical approximations we experience of points, lines, circles, and so forth.<sup>20</sup> So geometric "truths" are in fact mere approximations, and not exact truths.

Furthermore, geometric truth is no more necessary than its domain is a priori. The axioms of geometry are simply deeply confirmed empirical propositions. Geometry's illusion of necessity is generated from the fact that the axioms and postulates of geometry are so well confirmed, "almost every instant of our lives," that it can seem impossible to conceive otherwise.<sup>21</sup> But, of course, Mill is right – this does not make them necessary. Mill addresses the objection that experience cannot confirm a statement of possibility, or infinity, as in that parallel lines *never* meet, or that intersecting lines diverge *infinitely*. We cannot experience parallel lines never meeting; we can only experience parallel lines not meeting in our finite experience. To answer this, Mill appeals to the imagination.

First, he considers the verification of "two straight lines cannot enclose a space" to take the form that if two lines meet, there is no second place at which they meet. He points out that if they meet, it will not be at infinity, but at some finitely distant spot. Then he claims that to justify the proposition, we can go *in imagination* to the indefinitely far off spot at which the two formerly diverging lines are possibly meeting – to verify that if they do meet, they are not both straight, and at least one is "bent."

Supposing, therefore, such to be the case, we can transport ourselves thither in imagination and can frame a mental image of the appearance which one or both of the lines must present at the point, which we may rely on as being precisely similar to the reality. Now, . . . we learn by the evidence of experience that a line, which, after diverging from another straight line, begins to approach to it produces the impression on our senses which we describe by the expression, "a bent line," not by the expression, "a straight line."<sup>22</sup>

Mill supports these appeals to the imagination by claiming that they are conditioned by experience. But even if conditioned, or guided, by experience, it is

<sup>20</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. V, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. V, 3, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. V, 4.



not clear that such appeals to imagination truly count as empirical. Supporting the empirical nature of abstraction, Mill claims that experience enables us to “form mental pictures of all possible combinations of lines and angles,” and “the foundations of geometry would, therefore, be laid in direct experience, even if the experiments were practiced solely upon what we call our ideas, that is, upon the diagrams in our minds, and not upon outward objects.”<sup>23</sup> But at this point the view seems hardly more empirical than Kant’s theory of geometry, which Mill was trying to refute.

Mill’s philosophy of arithmetic seems even more problematic. Even Mill admits that it is harder to make empiricist sense of arithmetic, given its sheer generality. To his credit, he acknowledges that a trivial definitional account (what he calls “nominalism”) of “ $2 + 1 = 3$ ” is inadequate. Since arithmetic states real truths of some sort, they must be synthetic. But to an empiricist, there is no synthetic a priori realm of knowledge. So arithmetic, too, must be synthetic a posteriori. Thus, in every calculation, there is “a real induction, a real inference of facts from facts.”<sup>24</sup> As with geometric objects, which are disguised, approximate classifications of real physical objects, numbers connect directly to the world. There are no abstract numbers: “all numbers must be numbers of something,” though the generality of numbers means anything *can* be numbered.<sup>25</sup> Mill analyzes “ $2 + 1 = 3$ ” similarly to Frege’s analysis of “Hesperus is Phosphorus”: both are identities that can be learned from experience because despite the same denotation, there are different connotations involved. Both their true nature and the way these identities are learned are inductive: they refer to the fact that objects in the world, such as pebbles, can be manipulated into various different piles and arrangements.<sup>26</sup> This is the sad passage that Frege made so infamous by his amusing retort, “What a mercy, then, that not everything in the world is nailed down,” as well as a host of other serious criticisms. I will content myself here with pointing out that as in his explanation of geometry, toward the end of his comments on arithmetic, Mill seems to slip and contradict his own empiricism. He claims here that mathematical certainty exists, but only in the field of “pure number.” But as I understand his empiricism, there should be no such realm.

Insofar as he is such a thoroughgoing empiricist, Mill opens himself to harsh criticisms. One is simply the counterintuitive consequence that if the world were sufficiently different, then mathematics would be, too. Another is that Mill fails to distinguish psychological causes (e.g., how we learn that  $3 = 2 + 1$ )

<sup>23</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. V, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. VI, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. VI, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. VI, 2.

from justifications. A third is that Mill mixes up pure and applied mathematics. Perhaps Mill is disputing these distinctions, rather than failing to notice them. But in terms of where philosophy of mathematics was going in the nineteenth century, and where it went in the twentieth, Mill's philosophy of mathematics played the role of something to be argued against.

As I mentioned, however, there have been several recent “makeovers” of Mill's philosophy of mathematics. These reconstructions attempt to deflect some of the standard criticisms of what seems to be Mill's straightforward, flawed empiricism. They argue that Mill was really not as naïve as he may seem. Mathematics for Mill is not really about empirical objects, or actual observations of actual humans, but about ideal objects (or “doubly ideal” objects)<sup>27</sup> and/or idealizations that are to be understood in terms of “the ideal agent” characterized by Millian versions of the Peano axioms.<sup>28</sup> But if mathematics is about ideal triangles, or what an ideal number theorist can compute, then I no longer see how it is truly an empirical story. It certainly does not seem to be Mill's, for he avoided relying on metaphysical possibility (as Skorupski points out). Furthermore, their “empiricism” seems subject to similar criticisms as Mill originally received from Frege and others. If, say, geometry is about ideal objects, not physical ones, then manipulating real ones may explain how we have come to *believe* the axioms, but it does not account for the way we *justify* the axioms. Thus the “real world” appears to play a primarily psychological not justificatory role in our beliefs on this story. At least some of Frege's criticisms thus seem to apply to the reconstructed Mill as well as to the original.

In contrast with Mill's general programmatic empiricism, that of Gauss, Riemann, and Helmholtz was specifically motivated by the developments in non-Euclidean geometry, and it specifically targeted what we would now call applied geometry. Mill was right: the apparent necessity of Euclid's parallel postulate was an illusion. But Mill was wrong in thinking that the illusion of necessity arose from the depth of its empirical truth – from the many confirmations found in our real world experiences – for our real world experiences actually appear to contradict the postulate, at least when we look closely enough at certain features of the world. Mill also seems alone in his conclusion that the ultimate epistemological status of geometry (and all of mathematics) is empirical. In fact, the impact of the work in both mathematics and philosophy on non-Euclidean geometry is that geometry is generally regarded as the logical study of various related mathematical systems or structures, with

<sup>27</sup> Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, 134.

<sup>28</sup> Kitcher, “Mill, Mathematics, and the Naturalist Tradition,” 79–80.

questions of truth, reference, and applicability to the physical world separated from the primarily logical and conceptual questions. So traditional geometry was divided into the pure, mathematical part and the applied, empirical part.

The distinction between pure and applied geometry presupposes a shift in the underlying conception of space. Prior to non-Euclidean geometries, the study of space was more or less Euclidean geometry, part of pure mathematics. Subsequently, what we have is empiricism about physical space. More fully, the study of space is separated along the lines of pure versus applied geometry into the abstract investigation of various possible structures and the empirical question of which possibilities best capture the physical world. For Kant and Fourier, experience was directly relevant to, or even the source of, mathematics. Now experience plays only a causal or psychological role in explaining the source of mathematical concepts; justification is left largely to logic. With Hilbert this will evolve into the view of mathematics as the study of axiomatic systems.

This separation between pure and applied geometry also leads to an asymmetry in the philosophy of mathematics, reflected in later philosophical movements. Though there are various geometric systems, so that no one system seems a priori imposed or necessary, there appears to be only one genuine system of arithmetic. The apparent necessity of arithmetic, in contrast with any one system of geometry, led generally to the view that the two are epistemically distinct. Disagreements over how to understand this asymmetry led to new philosophical views about arithmetic in the late nineteenth century and beyond, that is, to logicism and intuitionism.

The development of alternative geometries thus had an enormous impact on the philosophy of mathematics. We now have a clear distinction between pure and applied mathematics, a great emphasis on logical relationships that is surely relevant to the inspiration of logicism, and we soon get the position called “formalism” or “axiomatics” associated with Hilbert and his followers. In an important sense, however, the developers of non-Euclidean geometry presupposed some of this philosophical conception of mathematics rather than arguing for it. Their mathematical work did not simply result in a new philosophical conception of truth. The new conception of mathematical truth, as closely tied to logical possibility, had to be in place already for the mathematical payoff to occur. That is, the view that in developing the logical consequences of the negated parallel postulate what they were doing *was* mathematics required a prior, or simultaneous, change in the philosophical conception of what mathematics is. Because Saccheri worked under the older conception, he goes down in history at the end of the old rather than the beginning of the new era in

geometry. Philosophy and mathematics thus had to change together for the evolution of non-Euclidean geometry.

## ALGEBRA

It may at first seem curious, but similar questions – about meaning, reference, and applicability versus freedom and logical possibility – drove debates in algebra over things as mundane as negative and imaginary numbers. The British algebraist school is mostly responsible for these crucial philosophical debates and, therefore, for the mathematical progress that eventually occurred. This progress first required a motive for change.

The motive was to introduce the Continental, algebraic approach to calculus into England, which had been clinging to Newton's more geometric methods. The appeal of the Newtonian approach was not British nationalistic pride, at least not alone. The British regarded geometry as simply more trustworthy than algebra. After all, geometry had been a dependable, fairly rigorous science for more than two thousand years. In contrast, there was a definite distrust of the Continental method of manipulating symbols, such as  $\delta y / \delta x$ , as if they were quantities when they clearly did not stand for any quantities at all. A kindred worry surrounded related methods in analysis such as adding infinite series. What does “=” *mean* when applied to an infinite sum? How can *operations* be algebraically manipulated as if they are objects like numbers? More fundamentally, under what conditions can arithmetic methods be generalized or extended?

Though justifying algebra was a mere means to an end – that of using Continental analytic methods to teach calculus in England – attention to foundational problems led to important progress in algebra itself. But, as with geometry, the progress was intertwined with critical changes in the background philosophy of mathematics and, in particular, the implicit conception of mathematical truth. As in geometry, progress in algebra was temporarily blocked by traditional philosophical views about meaning and reference. Also as in geometry, the conception of mathematics implicit in algebra evolved during our period to one that allowed more freedom to the creative mathematician.

The basic worry about algebra at the time can be explained very simply. If algebra is generalized arithmetic, and the subject matter of arithmetic is quantity, or positive number, then it appears that some arithmetic operations are not generalizable and thus not a genuine part of algebra. The first step in generalizing arithmetic processes is to replace particular numbers with variables. So we move from “ $8 + 5 = 13$ ” to “ $a + b = c$ .” Now “ $a + b = c$ ” is everywhere

defined: for all values of  $a$  and  $b$  there is a  $c$  in the same number system (natural numbers, positive rationals, etc.) that satisfies the equation. Subtraction, however, raises a problem for generalization, for if algebra is just generalized arithmetic, then  $a - b$  is only well defined when  $a$  is greater than  $b$ . When  $a$  is less than  $b$ ,  $a - b$  generates a “result”  $c$  that is undefined for positive domains. A whole class of substitutions for  $a$  and  $b$  in  $a - b$  thus either is undefined or requires the extension of the domain into a new kind of number, negative numbers. Furthermore, if negative numbers are somehow allowed, then the worry just recurs in the form of other operations applied to them (such as the square root operation).

One might say, so what? Part of what is perplexing about this hubbub over negative numbers is that domain extensions were already common in number theory. Irrational numbers is a prominent, and very old, example. The key to the concern, however, lies in the underlying philosophy of number, which was based on the idea of quantity. Irrational numbers do not threaten this conception in the least, since they can be thought of (or at least initially introduced) as quantities of length. For example,  $\sqrt{2}$  can be introduced as the quantity corresponding to the length of the diagonal of the unit square. What, however, are negative quantities?

A common answer was “impossible.”<sup>29</sup> No quantity of stuff is even possibly negative. Along the same lines one can also see why the “quantity” 0 was long regarded as problematic. Since negative quantities seemed impossible, two common reactions to algebra were restriction or reinterpretation: restrict subtraction to the cases where  $a$  is greater than  $b$  or reinterpret the offensive results. The motives for rejecting negative numbers are quite traditional. Mathematics is a body of objective scientific knowledge. Its statements are, therefore, objectively true or objectively false. This means that they must have a definite content, which in turn requires that singular terms must in general have a reference. For  $3 - 8 = -5$  to be true, then, both  $3 - 8$  and  $-5$  must denote the same quantity. Since  $-5$  is not a quantity, the sentence is not a proper numerical assertion. It is mathematically meaningless owing to this failure of reference.

This objection to negative numbers began in the second half of the eighteenth century and continued until early in our period, between 1790 and the early 1800s. It should be seen against earlier attempts to accommodate negative numbers as quantities less than nothing, or those obtained by subtracting a greater

<sup>29</sup> See Augustus De Morgan, “Review of Peacock’s *A Treatise on Algebra*,” *Quarterly Journal of Education* 9 (1835): 91–110, 293–311, and Ernest Nagel, “Impossible Numbers: A Chapter in the History of Modern Logic,” *Studies in the History of Ideas* 3 (1935): 429–74, for references to Frend, Playfair, and Woodhouse, all of whom used the term.

number from a lesser.<sup>30</sup> The idea of a quantity less than nothing, however, was thought to beg the question, for it simply extends the meaning of “quantity” along with that of “number.” And the idea of subtracting a greater from a lesser raises a prior question about the meaning of subtraction which was sometimes explicitly defined so as to rule out this extension – that is, as the taking of a lesser number from a greater. Francis Maseres (in both 1758 and 1800) and William Frend (in 1796) both ridiculed such attempts to ground negative numbers. They advocated a very restricted algebra on the grounds that negative numbers were not adequately defined, and results that involved them were consequently meaningless.<sup>31</sup> Algebra would in their view be simply a generalized arithmetic, where all the variables stood for positive numbers.<sup>32</sup> Even the staunchest antirealist of today would probably not advocate eliminating negative numbers from algebra. Nevertheless, the worry is understandable, for it is analogous to other worries, such as those about large cardinals, which we still debate on realist/antirealist grounds. Mathematics is the most precise of the objective sciences, and domain extensions need to be justified. When a more cautious (antirealist) attitude is coupled with a specific concern over the nonrigorous treatment of the concepts and in the justification of results, the worry is understandable from a mathematical, as well as a philosophical, perspective.

There are thus two distinct, though related, concerns here – one more on the philosophical side, and one more on the mathematical side. The more philosophical worry is over meaning, reference, and content, as explained earlier. The existence of negative numbers was regarded as inadequately justified even by eminent mathematicians who favored them, because there was no obvious interpretation of them in terms of some *quantity*. Greenfield explains, “The very vague and unsatisfactory, and often mysterious accounts of the matter, which are given even by writers of the greatest eminence, serve only to shew, that . . . something still remains which ought to be explained, and of which no good explanation has been given.”<sup>33</sup> This is essentially a metaphysical concern about the nature of numbers, which is related to the general question of how new entities are discovered, or domains are extended, in mathematics. What *are* numbers such that they can (now) come in a negative variety?

The more mathematical (though also philosophical) worry is over the methods of treating negative numbers. Greenfield also articulates this problem.

<sup>30</sup> Helena Pycior, “George Peacock and the British Origins of Symbolical Algebra,” *Historia Mathematica* 8 (1981): 28.

<sup>31</sup> Pycior, “George Peacock,” 27.

<sup>32</sup> See also Ewald, Introductory note to Gregory in *From Kant to Hilbert*, for a similar background sketch.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Pycior, “George Peacock,” 30.

“[A] complaint remains, which appears to be too well founded, that the Method of negative quantities . . . is supported, rather by induction and analogy, than by mathematical demonstration.”<sup>34</sup> Though he does not clearly distinguish this worry from the first, it is more methodological than metaphysical. Reasoning by analogy is notoriously prone to error and is not a form of rigorous mathematical justification. Owing to the absence of rigorous justifications for the methods involving negative numbers, such as the rule that a negative times a negative yields a positive, there is a genuine concern that generalizing operations such as subtraction could lead to inconsistencies, or at least false conclusions. Together, these two worries raise a more abstract philosophical question over the proper relation between meaning and method in mathematics.

Though Greenfield nicely articulated these two worries, he was not an advocate of restriction. Instead he encouraged algebraists to *find* demonstrations showing the reliability of methods involving negative quantities. Woodhouse, too, advocated a pragmatic approach. Although he regarded the concepts of negative and imaginary numbers as unintelligible, he believed that the success of algebra meant that there was “some principle or other” that justified the methods.<sup>35</sup> Underlying these pragmatic responses is perhaps the distinction between discovery and justification. Though induction and analogy might be used to discover new mathematical principles, once discovered, the principles require a proper, and more rigorous, mathematical justification. We might have to wait a while for the justification, but the usefulness of the results makes the wait worthwhile.

In 1830 Peacock published *A Treatise on Algebra*,<sup>36</sup> in which he tried to solve the problem of justifying negative and complex numbers. What he proposed, however, was so radical that he himself did not fully embrace it, and it was a couple of decades before the point of view became more widely accepted. Like many other British mathematicians of the time, Peacock was strongly motivated by pedagogical issues, and a main purpose of his book was to clarify algebra for the students. He agreed with Frend and Maseres that it was impossible to justify a generalization of subtraction by appeal to applied arithmetic principles (that of debt, for example). However, he did not conclude that algebra should be restricted to universal arithmetic. Instead, he distinguished arithmetic algebra, or universal arithmetic, from symbolical algebra. Both are causally and psychologically rooted in arithmetic, but they are two different sciences with different kinds of justifications. Peacock’s revolutionary idea was

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Pycior, “George Peacock,” 30.

<sup>35</sup> Nagel, “Impossible Numbers,” 446–7.

<sup>36</sup> *A Treatise on Algebra* (Cambridge: J. & J. J. Deighton, 1830).

a formalistic approach to symbolical algebra. Though the restricted, arithmetic algebra is a meaningful system with true results, he urged that symbolical algebra be thought of as a mere system of signs, with negative numbers introduced simply as an assumption.<sup>37</sup>

Peacock held a traditional philosophical view of most of pure mathematics, where axioms are meaningful assertions that are intuitively true. His formalism applied only to symbolical algebra, which he explained as an arbitrary (though defined) system of signs and symbols. The signs are fully defined by the laws governing their possible combinations. One can interpret them, but the interpretations are permitted to vary so that the pure mathematics of the system, and thus its results, are logically independent of the possible interpretations. Any “meaning” we might attribute to the signs is detached from the acceptability of the first principles and any results derived from them. The one necessary requirement of such a system is consistency; otherwise, the mathematician is free to construct the system so that it is convenient or interesting to him.<sup>38</sup> One gets the idea of a formalistic structuralism in Peacock’s program for symbolical algebra.

Treating symbolical algebra formalistically was a revolutionary philosophical idea – too revolutionary for most at the time, including Peacock himself. Many mathematicians criticized the idea of freeing algebra from its metaphysical fetters of meaning and truth (i.e., what could be shown true by proof or argument from accepted meanings). Ironically, this included Hamilton, who was a Kantian at the time but who later used Peacock’s suggestion of freedom in his invention of quaternions.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, though Peacock advocates mathematical freedom and endorses the arbitrariness of the algebraic laws, he fails to use his idea of freedom to produce significant new mathematics, and he even contradicts his formalist philosophical slogans elsewhere within the *Treatise*. One impediment was Peacock’s “principle of the permanence of equivalent forms,” which constrained the operations of even symbolical algebra so that they agreed with arithmetic algebra whenever possible.<sup>40</sup> Peacock further worries that without generalizing from arithmetic to guide the selection of algebraic laws we might end up with a useless system. Though, of course, applicability is important in mathematics, it is somewhat unfortunate

<sup>37</sup> Pycior, “George Peacock,” 34–5.

<sup>38</sup> Pycior, “George Peacock,” 35–6.

<sup>39</sup> William Rowan Hamilton, “Theory of Conjugate Functions or Algebraic Couples; with a Preliminary and Elementary Essay on Algebra as the Science of Pure Time,” *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 17, pt. I (1837): 293–422, excerpted in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 369–75; Hamilton, Preface to the “Lectures on Quaternions,” in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 376–425.

<sup>40</sup> Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 320–1.



that Peacock was so timid about his own revolutionary idea. It was, however, conceived almost seventy years before Hilbert's famous employment of it in geometry.

Like Peacock's, De Morgan's philosophical writings on mathematics are strongly motivated by pedagogical concerns. Best known for his contributions to logic, and in particular for the "De Morgan laws," his writings about logic and mathematics show great sympathy for the learner. He was in principle opposed to "top-down" presentations of logic and mathematics, at least those presentations that might be used in teaching. His *Differential and Integral Calculus* begins with a significant introduction summarizing the history of the idea of limits, providing many examples to ground the basic concepts and filled with verbose explanations.<sup>41</sup> He is clearly trying gently to persuade the reader to take his path. As Joan Richards has argued, along with many other British algebraists De Morgan is motivated more by the desire for conceptual clarity and accessibility than by logical rigor in definitions. For De Morgan, however, the concern for clarity is not a mere psychological concern, to be clearly demarcated from concerns about logic and justification. He believed that problems of clarity *are* foundational problems.<sup>42</sup>

Pycior argues that there are three phases in De Morgan's philosophy of algebra.<sup>43</sup> First, there is a conservative, traditional phase when he believed that axioms are intuitive truths reflecting prior meanings of the basic terms (up to the early 1830s.) Second, there is a radical formalistic phase when he defends Peacock's symbolical algebra (around 1835). Last, there is an ambivalent phase when, influenced by criticisms of Kantians such as Peacock, Whewell, and Hamilton, De Morgan calls symbolical algebra an "art" rather than a science and emphasizes the need to interpret it. For example, "*symbolic algebra*: an art, not a science; and an apparently useless art, except as it may afterwards furnish the grammar of a science."<sup>44</sup> In what follows I will focus on the second phase. Here, in his defense of Peacock's algebra, De Morgan's philosophical views are revolutionary.

Our glimpse into De Morgan's middle period is provided mainly by his 1835 review of Peacock's *A Treatise on Algebra*. As in his own calculus text, he approaches the issue of domain extension in algebra gently, first exploring the idea of extensions of meaning in general. An example he uses is that of "to see"

<sup>41</sup> Augustus De Morgan, *The Differential and Integral Calculus* (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1842).

<sup>42</sup> Joan Richards, "Augustus De Morgan, the History of Mathematics and the Foundations of Algebra," *Isis* 78 (1987): 10.

<sup>43</sup> Helena Pycior, "The Three Stages of Augustus De Morgan's Algebraic Work," *Isis* 74 (1983): 211–26.

<sup>44</sup> Augustus De Morgan, *Trigonometry and Double Algebra* (1849), reference to first two chapters of bk. II reprinted in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 11.

where we can “see” many things that are not visible, such as the guilt of murder and the difference in style between Rossini and Handel.<sup>45</sup> De Morgan’s crucial point here is that sometimes there are good, though implicit, reasons for extending a term to new cases, rather than finding some new term for the new cases. In mathematics, for example, the shared structure between the positive and negative numbers supports the domain extension.

Further, De Morgan hypothesizes that in time we will not resist the proposed analogy between positive and negative numbers. With foresight he argues that the apparent “impossibility” of negative and complex numbers is simply a result of their novelty:

It is as if a race of calculators had no conception of fractional parts, but only of whole numbers. They would call fractions impossible, and would be surprised to find that operations conducted with these inconceivable quantities were true and intelligible, whenever they happened to give whole results. In time they would come to understand the extension by which fractions are formed from whole numbers, after which the name of impossible would be dropped. So in the present case, the methods and results of an extension have matured, before the extension has been formally made.<sup>46</sup>

De Morgan attributes the current attitude toward these quantities to common resistance in science to anything revolutionary, that is, in part to psychology.

The novelty of his contribution emerges toward the end of the first part of the review, where De Morgan argues that symbolical algebra is consistent. This responds to Greenfield’s complaint that we have no explanation of why algebra works given that it is not grounded in intuitively meaningful concepts, or self-evident first principles. What is striking is that De Morgan’s justification of algebra is essentially a relative consistency proof. Though algebra does not have a specific interpretation, the necessary condition, as Peacock noted, is that the principles be consistent. In his review of Peacock’s text, De Morgan rehearses a geometric interpretation for the generalized symbols of algebra from Warren, where “ $a$   $b$   $c$ , &c. indicate not numbers, but lines, all in one plane.”<sup>47</sup> The expressions  $a + b$  and  $a - b$  here refer to diagonals of parallelograms determined by  $a$  and  $b$ . De Morgan explicitly claims that the interpretation shows that algebra is consistent, and thus it also explains why it works when it is applied. That is, it explains “how it has happened that no error has ever arisen from the use of the square roots of negative quantities, that is, from the application of the principles of numbers to things which were not number.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> De Morgan, “Review,” 92.

<sup>46</sup> De Morgan, “Review,” 109.

<sup>47</sup> De Morgan, “Review,” 106.

<sup>48</sup> De Morgan, “Review,” 109.

The conception is a rather sophisticated formalism. De Morgan first points out the arbitrariness of the symbols: “there is no magic virtue in  $+$  and  $-$  by which the first must mean addition and the second subtraction. . . . There is only one question for the student. Are the consequences asserted of the definition such as are logically deducible from it, and no others?”<sup>49</sup> Then he uses several examples to argue that the interpretation of the signs can vary without changing the form of the theorems provable. He finally argues that changing the interpretation of the symbols can *never* affect the truth of the theorems or methods.<sup>50</sup>

De Morgan thus appears to be defending Peacock’s purely symbolical algebra as a freestanding symbolical system. Indeed, De Morgan criticizes both Peacock’s principle of the permanence of equivalent forms and his use of arithmetic as the “suggesting” science for the proper interpretations of algebra, comparing the former to “some of the loose earth dug out of the foundation, which has been neglected to be cleared away when the building was finished.”<sup>51</sup> So his conception of symbolical algebra was actually more formalistic than Peacock’s at the time. Though the use of geometry to interpret algebra was already well known, De Morgan’s originality and insight lay in his account of what such interpretations showed. Peacock had acknowledged that consistency was the one necessary condition of symbolical algebra. De Morgan here argues explicitly that it is also sufficient. Furthermore, he is clear that geometry is not a mathematical foundation for algebra, as the geometric interpretation might suggest. Geometry does not ground the truths of algebra. It is simply used to show consistency.

The response is thus a new philosophical conception: one that gives up the insistence on meaningfulness and truth of first principles and focuses instead on consistency. As mentioned previously, De Morgan retreats from this sophisticated perspective to one where an interpretation is required for the symbolic system to be significant, and indeed truly mathematical. In these later writings he appeals several times to the striking metaphor of putting together a puzzle with the pieces turned upside down – so the pieces would be seen as mere forms with no images – to illustrate the difference between a mere symbolic and an interpreted system. Interestingly, he claims that the person “who looks at the fronts” or images to put the puzzle together “more closely resembles the

<sup>49</sup> De Morgan, “Review,” 103.

<sup>50</sup> De Morgan, “Review,” 104–5.

<sup>51</sup> De Morgan, “Review,” 308; see also 300–2, 308–10. See, however, Menachem Fisch, who argues in “The Making of Peacock’s Treatise on Algebra: A Case of Creative Indecision,” *Archive for the History of Exact Sciences* 54 (1999): 137–79, that Peacock’s principles were truly foundational and not mere “scaffolding.”

investigator and the mathematician.”<sup>52</sup> It is an interesting cultural and historical question why the seed of abstract rigor took so long to germinate on British soil.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, this faltering step constitutes important philosophical progress for algebra and indeed for mathematics generally. That it occurred in 1835 – well before relative consistency proofs for non-Euclidean geometry – underscores the depth of De Morgan’s philosophical abilities.

## ANALYSIS

It is a commonplace that analysis was “rigorized,” or “arithmetized,” in our period. Cauchy and Weierstrass supplied precise definitions for concepts such as “continuous” in terms of numbers, sets, functions, and inequalities, and thus they overthrew the former practice of relying on geometric intuition for these concepts. Once the basic concepts of analysis were arithmetically defined, more rigorous proofs replaced the former arguments that appealed to geometric assumptions and diagrams. Arithmetization is regarded as the natural precedent to Fregean logicism. As the story sometimes goes, analysis was “reduced” to arithmetic, and then arithmetic was “reduced” to logic. If logicism had succeeded, these two programs would have shown that much of “pure” mathematics (as then understood) had the same nature and certainty as logic.

Though the order of events seems roughly correct, analysis was not immediately arithmetized. The introduction of arithmetic rigor occurred in many small steps – as well as a few leaps. In addition, the use of the term “reduction” can be misleading, at least when understood in a narrow sense as driven by epistemic worries. Programs called “reductionistic” are indeed often motivated by a more complex set of issues, including the desire for “proper,” or appropriate, justifications. This motive was relevant to the rigorization of analysis, and indeed to logicism.

The eighteenth century ends with an overdue attempt by mathematics to answer a challenge from philosophy. The challenge was from Berkeley, who between 1707 and 1734 repeatedly argued that the basic concepts of calculus were unclear, and the methods were also fallacious. Berkeley’s challenge to the analysts was to show that calculus could be better justified than theology, which he was defending. During our period the challenge was finally taken

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Richards, “Augustus De Morgan,” 16, from an article written in 1842. The metaphor is also used in De Morgan, *Trigonometry and Double Algebra*, par. 10.

<sup>53</sup> See Joan Richards, “Rigor and Clarity: Foundations of Mathematics in France and England, 1800–1840,” *Science in Context* 4 (1991): 297–319, for some suggestions.

up, and by 1870 it had essentially been met. The intervening years for analysis present a complex episode in the history of mathematics.

The heroes of the story are Cauchy, Bolzano, and Weierstrass. Euler, Lagrange, Lacroix, Riemann, Dedekind, and many others, are also important. The mathematical concepts in question include “function,” “limit,” “infinity,” “infinitesimal,” “convergence,” “existence,” and “continuous.” Among others, these needed more careful definitions for progress to occur. The aim of our heroes was a systematic, scientific basis for calculus, which meant a logically correct foundation based on logical/mathematical facts about functions rather than psychology, intuitive evidence, or external justifications from disciplines such as geometry or physics. Weierstrass and Dedekind also desired a *complete* foundation, which produced, finally, a rigorous theory of real numbers. A philosophical tool they shared was a distinction between the context of discovery and the context of (appropriate) justification, which is critical for providing a philosophical motive for their foundational work. (A mathematical tool they all appealed to uncritically was the notion of set, which Cantor took up in the years following our period.)

Berkeley’s critique was three-pronged. First, the basic concepts of calculus lacked a clear meaning, so calculus cannot be a body of truths.<sup>54</sup> Second, what meaning they had originated in foreign sources such as geometry or physics – points, tangents, and areas for Leibniz’s infinitesimals, and velocity for Newton’s fluxions – but this is inappropriate for a discipline of pure mathematics.<sup>55</sup> Third and most problematic, the use made of these concepts was inconsistent, so the methods were not rigorous.<sup>56</sup> The first two critiques are more philosophical than mathematical. As with the struggle in algebra over negative and complex numbers, Berkeley’s first two criticisms focus on issues of meaning and reference and are in part motivated by his empiricism. For example: “Axiom. No reasoning about things whereof we have no idea. Therefore no reasoning about Infinitesimals.”<sup>57</sup> However, the third was a serious critique of what the mathematicians were *doing*. It occurs in a detailed attack on the practice of sometimes treating infinitesimals as really small – when dividing and multiplying by them, say – and sometimes treating them as zero – when they occur as a remainder that we discharge. Berkeley’s criticism

<sup>54</sup> George Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries* (1707–8), excerpted in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 14–16, notebook B; *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, Part One* (1710), excerpted in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 21–37, par. 132; and “The Analyst” (1734), in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 62–92.

<sup>55</sup> *Philosophical Commentaries*, notebook A; “De Motu” (1721), in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 38–54, par. 63ff.

<sup>56</sup> “The Analyst”; see especially pars. 13–20.

<sup>57</sup> *Philosophical Commentaries*, notebook B, entry 354.

is that even if mathematicians are able to get useful results with this practice, it is inconsistent. And even small inconsistencies entail that the method is not mathematically rigorous.

Berkeley's critique in *The Analyst* (1734) is forceful, clear, and relentless. It is a critique of mathematics on mathematics' own terms. It demands an answer. Yet it was essentially ignored for fifty years.

There are reasons for this. Calculus is an area of mathematics that historically emerged in physics, and its development proceeded with the needs of science and issues of application in mind. In contrast with using calculus to discover new results, the foundations of the discipline may not have seemed to constitute a genuine mathematical problem. Even if genuine, it did not seem urgent as long as work in calculus continued to be mathematically fruitful.

One mathematician who paid attention to Berkeley's critique just prior to and early in our period was Lagrange, who was an important influence on two of our main heroes, Cauchy and Bolzano. The historical background is also relevant. In 1794 the *ecole* system was developed in France and drew more mathematicians out of the (now suppressed) academies and into the classrooms.<sup>58</sup> The focus was still practical: teaching students a technique for solving problems. But the necessity of *teaching* calculus brought with it new attention to foundational matters, for in teaching one must explain the primitive concepts of a discipline. By default, more attention was paid to definitions and justifications for the basic operations of calculus.

Lagrange's historical situation and his appreciation for Berkeley's critique made him a particularly critical figure for the revolution in analysis. He believed that calculus required a purely algebraic foundation. With Euler he treats the operations of the calculus as functional rather than geometric or quasi-physical. And in 1784, fifty years after Berkeley's attack, he helped set the problem for a prize given by the Berlin Academy. The problem to be solved was the foundations of calculus, and the challenge was to find a clear, rigorous, yet simple account of the infinite that would treat both infinitely small quantities and infinite series so as to explain "how so many true theorems have been deduced from a contradictory supposition."<sup>59</sup> Thanks to Lagrange's influence, the foundations of calculus were catapulted into the spotlight as a serious mathematical problem just before our period begins.

Though the 1784 Berlin prize did not secure the desired account, it did set the stage for more attention to be paid to the foundations of the calculus and to

<sup>58</sup> For a good summary see Umberto Bottazzini, *The Higher Calculus: A History of Real and Complex Analysis from Euler to Weierstrass* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986), chap. 2.1.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Judith Grabiner, *The Origins of Cauchy's Rigorous Calculus* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 41.

analysis more generally. In 1817 and 1821 Bolzano and Cauchy independently and almost simultaneously discovered more rigorous definitions of concepts such as *continuous* and *limit*. At least as important, they both also used these new definitions to produce more rigorous proofs of results such as the intermediate value theorem (which says that a continuous function with values both above and below a certain value,  $c$ , also has the value  $c$  somewhere in between). Less well known is that they were both influenced by Lagrange. They had slightly different motives for attending to foundational matters. Cauchy's concerns seem more traditional and epistemic; for example, he advocates rigorous demonstrations "to make all uncertainty disappear."<sup>60</sup> Bolzano, in contrast, is motivated by a much more complex philosophical program that included a theory of proper grounds in mathematics and science. Lagrange's influence and the historical context are what link the two.

Cauchy's aim for rigor in first principles reflects Lagrange's influence. However, though he agreed with Lagrange that an algebraic foundation was needed for calculus, Cauchy disagreed on what form this foundation should take. Where Lagrange used power series and the algebra of equalities, Cauchy used the algebra of inequalities. Newton had already appealed to limits in his account of ultimate ratios, and his conception of limit was almost ours – that of a bound to which a variable can get arbitrarily close (though Newton adds that it "ultimately" reaches the bound).<sup>61</sup> Cauchy appropriated the central idea of a bound as defined in terms of the ability of a variable to get arbitrarily close to a certain quantity. And, crucially, he captured the idea purely algebraically.

Cauchy's work on error theory probably gave him the idea of using similar techniques based on inequalities to prove the existence of limits and to determine their values.<sup>62</sup> Though he takes the existence of all the real numbers for granted – a defect that Weierstrass and Dedekind later remedied – a new step toward rigor was in not taking the existence of limits and other values for granted. Cauchy recognized the need to *prove* the existence of certain values (such as are claimed in the intermediate value theorem) rather than just to compute them.

Cauchy not only came up with a good definition of limits, he used it as the basis of the other fundamental concepts of calculus. First, he defined convergence and continuity in 1821. Then in 1823 he used the same basic ideas to define "derivative" and "integral." Again, he took an old idea and gave it a new, algebraic polish. For example, "derivative" is still conceived as "the limit

<sup>60</sup> Cauchy (1821), quoted in Grabiner, *Origins of Cauchy's Rigorous Calculus*, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Grabiner, *Origins of Cauchy's Rigorous Calculus*, 82.

<sup>62</sup> See Grabiner, *Origins of Cauchy's Rigorous Calculus*, chap. 3; interestingly, Grabiner speculates that the  $\varepsilon$  in the " $\varepsilon$ - $\delta$ " notation is from the word "error" in error theory.

of the ratio of the quotient of differences.” But because “limit” is now precisely defined, so is “derivative.” Cauchy also used these new definitions in more rigorous proofs, and it is here that the now-standard “ $\epsilon \delta$ ” notation is first found. Cauchy’s general attitude toward existence noted earlier – that it must be proved – extended to derivatives and integrals, and it may have been important for the later detachment of these from the continuity of functions.<sup>63</sup>

A bit earlier than Cauchy, Bolzano was also breaking new analytic ground. Though Bolzano’s work was mostly unknown during our period, unlike Cauchy, Bolzano offers detailed, deep, and novel philosophical arguments for the reform in analysis. Many mathematicians were becoming unhappy with “foreign” or “transcendental” disciplines in analysis proofs. However, Bolzano’s arguments make it clear that the primary point of the revolution was not *reduction*, but *purification*.

Bolzano’s philosophy was aimed at mathematical methodology in general. He was guided by a vision of mathematics as arranged in a hierarchy. The most general areas, such as arithmetic, will be presupposed by, though they will not exhaust, the more particular areas. The idea is that when new concepts are added, a new level is created for a more specific and less fundamental subdiscipline. Thus, the introduction of new concepts automatically increases the complexity of a discipline.

For Bolzano arithmetic belongs to the most fundamental part of mathematics because everything is countable, even objects of thought.<sup>64</sup> He specifically argues for this point, later echoed by Frege, “objects not open to the senses, for example spirits and spiritual forces, can also become objects of mathematics and in particular of numerical calculation.”<sup>65</sup> Geometry and chronometry are examples of “subordinate” parts of mathematics, for while they presuppose the general concepts and procedures of arithmetic, their content is not exhausted by these general principles.<sup>66</sup> Laws of causality and motion are even more subordinate because they presuppose not only time and space but also matter.<sup>67</sup> In connection with his hierarchical vision, Bolzano distinguishes between kinds of mathematical proofs, some of which he believes ought to be jettisoned from a correct “scientific” presentation. Required are proper “grounding” proofs rather than mere deductions. A proper grounding proof demonstrates its result

<sup>63</sup> Grabiner, *Origins of Cauchy’s Rigorous Calculus*, 112–15.

<sup>64</sup> Bernard Bolzano, “Contributions to a Better-Grounded Presentation of Mathematics” (1810), in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 176–224, I, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Bolzano, “Contributions,” 2.

<sup>66</sup> Bolzano, “Contributions,” 11.

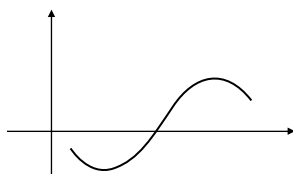
<sup>67</sup> Bolzano, “Contributions,” 15; for more details and a somewhat different analysis, see Philip Kitcher, “Bolzano’s Ideal of Algebraic Analysis,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 6 (1975): 229–69.



by appealing to the mathematical and logical facts that make it true. Since a cause is “a *ground* which acts in *time*,”<sup>68</sup> a mathematical ground is something like a cause outside time. Indeed, Bolzano’s requirement of grounding proofs in mathematics is comparable to the causal theory of explanation in science (according to which a deduction from laws of nature and initial conditions must be causal to be explanatory). For both, mere deduction is insufficient for a scientific presentation, or account, of the facts.<sup>69</sup>

Instead of proper grounding proofs, mathematicians commonly accept several forms of “mere deduction.” One example is the use of indirect proof when unnecessary. Another, more obscure, form of mere deduction is that which “crosses to another kind.” Bolzano’s worry about such “crossings” is that they not only fail to display the real reason for the result; they also risk being circular.<sup>70</sup> This interesting objection underlies his celebrated “purely analytic” proof of the intermediate value theorem.

The intermediate value theorem (IVT) says that if a continuous function takes values both above and below a certain value, it must also take the value in between. The intermediate zero theorem (IZT) is a special case of the IVT, saying that a continuous function with both positive and negative values also has a zero value in between. Representing a continuous function by a curve on a two-dimensional graph, a picture immediately convinces one that the theorem is true.



Bolzano’s opposition to geometric pictures or facts in analysis proofs flows straight from his hierarchical vision of mathematics together with his theory of objective grounds. A theorem in a particular discipline must be logically independent of (or prior to) the disciplines that are subordinate, or logically

<sup>68</sup> Bolzano, “Contributions,” 15n.; emphasis in the original.

<sup>69</sup> Bolzano, *Wissenschaftslehre* (1837), abridged trans. Rolf George as *Theory of Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), bk. 2, pt. III. See also Paolo Mancosu, *Philosophy of Mathematics and Mathematical Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Mancosu, “Bolzano and Cournot on Mathematical Explanation,” *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences* 52 (1999): 429–55; and Kitcher, “Bolzano’s Ideal of Algebraic Analysis,” for such comparisons.

<sup>70</sup> Bolzano, “Contributions,” II, 29.

“subsequent,” to it. So the proper proof of such a theorem cannot include a part of mathematics less fundamental than it.

Appealing to the geometric fact, or typical picture, to “show” the IZT thus involves a “crossing to another kind” – indeed, one that is circular.

Consider now the objective reason why a line in the above-mentioned circumstances intersects the x-axis. Everyone will, no doubt, see very soon that this reason lies in nothing other than that general truth, as a result of which every continuous function of  $x$  which is positive for one value of  $x$ , and negative for another, must be zero for some intermediate value of  $x$ . And this is just the truth which is to be proved. It is therefore quite wrong to have allowed the latter to be derived from the former. . . . Rather, conversely, the former must be derived from the latter if we wish to represent the truths in the science in the same way as they are linked to each other in their objective coherence.<sup>71</sup>

The issue for Bolzano is methodological. It is “an intolerable offence against *correct method* to derive truths of *pure* (or general) mathematics (i.e., arithmetic, algebra, analysis) from considerations which belong to a merely *applied* (or special) part, namely geometry.”<sup>72</sup> The reason the geometric picture convinces is that we presuppose in our understanding of the picture “the truth which is to be proved.”

Bolzano’s philosophy of mathematics deserves more attention, but it should be clear that it was his philosophical views that motivated his famous “purely analytic” proof of the IVT. Furthermore, his more general objection to geometric pictures in analysis was driven less by what we would now call “logical rigor” than by a philosophical theory of justificatory propriety in mathematics.

Though Cauchy and Bolzano made great strides in purifying, synthesizing, and systematizing analysis, there was more work to be done. The two had similar definitions of *continuous function*, but Bolzano’s work pointed toward the distinction between continuity and derivability while Cauchy was more tied to the classical idea by which they were united.<sup>73</sup> In addition, both Bolzano and Cauchy had a circle in their foundation about which at least Cauchy seemed unconcerned. They both used concepts of limit and convergence to define irrational numbers, but they presupposed the completeness (and existence) of the real numbers in the convergence account of limit.<sup>74</sup> Work by Weierstrass, Dedekind, and others corrected these weaknesses.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Bolzano, “Purely Analytic Proof. . . .” in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 227–48, preface, I.

<sup>72</sup> Bolzano, “Purely Analytic Proof. . . .”

<sup>73</sup> Bottazzini, *The Higher Calculus*, 106.

<sup>74</sup> Bottazzini, *The Higher Calculus*, 110.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Richard Dedekind, “On the Introduction of New Functions in Mathematics” (1854) and “Continuity and Irrational Numbers” (1872), both in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 755–62, 766–79.

In the 1860s and 1870s Weierstrass and Dedekind strove for even greater rigor in the foundations of analysis. So long as the real number system was presupposed, there was an implicit appeal to the “foreign” or “transcendental” area of geometry in analysis, for our understanding of the real numbers is first from the geometric line. Weierstrass and Dedekind became more and more convinced that a truly rigorous foundation for analysis had to be based on natural numbers alone. This conviction motivates the step from algebraization to arithmetization. Weierstrass refers to Riemann’s theory of functions as the “wrong path” since it appeals to the “transcendental.”<sup>76</sup> And Dedekind, also influenced by Riemann, noted that space might not actually be continuous. Our experience of space does not require continuity, for experience can be modeled by an everywhere dense domain, such as the rationals. So we cannot rely on space for our theory of irrational number.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, for both Dedekind and Weierstrass the concept of number is logically independent of geometry and geometric intuition, and for Dedekind, all numbers are creations of *thought*. The remedy for all of these problems was to define the real numbers in terms of the rationals based on what are now known as “Dedekind cuts.” It is important to note, however, that both Dedekind and Weierstrass recognized the utility of appeals to geometry. Neither would have proposed that mathematicians do their creative and informal work purely rigorously, or “arithmetically.” It is just for the sake of the foundation of the discipline that they thought it important to show the *possibility* of reconstructions, to show that the foundation is sufficiently rigorous and autonomous from geometry.<sup>78</sup>

The detachment of analysis from geometry has important philosophical consequences. The move begins with Lagrange, who emphasized the functional nature of calculus. And it is indebted to Euler and others who had promoted a more pure “correspondence” conception of function. The work on non-Euclidean and Riemannian geometries already pointed to an epistemic asymmetry between geometry and arithmetic. Arithmetic seems much closer to a body of necessary truth; whereas the nature of geometric truth was as yet up in the air, though certainly empiricism was a main contender (from Gauss, Riemann, and Helmholtz) and conventionalism was not far off. In contrast, nobody but Mill thought that arithmetic has an ultimately empirical nature – it just seems too central to thought. Certainly people were already seeing geometry as less strictly “pure” than arithmetic and algebra even early in our period. Providing a purely arithmetic foundation for analysis, then, makes it possible

<sup>76</sup> Bottazzini, *The Higher Calculus*, 259.

<sup>77</sup> Dedekind, “Continuity and Irrational Numbers.”

<sup>78</sup> Bottazzini, *The Higher Calculus*, chaps. 7.1, 7.2.

to justify aligning analysis more closely with arithmetic rather than geometry, and thus to more securely justify the view that our knowledge of analysis is *a priori*.

## CONCLUSION

It may seem distinctive that progress in calculus and analysis during our period required that its basic concepts be given precise algebraic definitions. One motive was a purely mathematical concern over how to apply basic concepts such as “limit” to odd cases. But it was also motivated by Berkeley-type philosophical worries about meaning and reference. In contrast, as we saw previously, progress in algebra occurred during the same historical period when specifying the meaning and reference of variables was given up.

However, the similarities between our three disciplines outweigh the apparent differences. Though the meanings of “limit,” “function,” and “convergence” were made more precise, and apparently more definite, this was accomplished by focusing on methodological issues. Cauchy and Bolzano did not fix the meanings of the basic terms in order to capture some prior, metaphysical, or mathematical referents. They fixed them in order to achieve proper, pure methods in analysis, which meant purely algebraic definitions and more rigorous proofs. So here, too, mathematics was liberated from some metaphysical fetters – those of “fluxion” and “infinitesimal” – in favor of methodological purity.

Mathematics was “liberated” because of a greater use of logic in our three domains. Bolstering it is a change in the philosophical conception of the source of mathematics and the nature of mathematical truth. The prior conception strongly connected mathematical truth with abstraction from experience. This “quasi-empiricism” in its source bled into the methods and justifications of mathematics. The philosophical distinction between discovery and justification repeatedly alluded to by mathematicians in the nineteenth century was thus crucial. The quasi-empiricism permitted in the context of discovery is at this time being purged from the context of justification. This allows a liberated conception of mathematical truth as linked more closely with logical possibility. It is at the same time a more precise conception of truth owing to the role of logic in explicating it.

The philosophical developments discussed in this chapter both derive from and support the greater role of logic in mathematics. For example, clearer distinctions between mathematical theory and interpretation, and pure versus applied mathematics, are possible because mathematical truth is now linked more closely with logical *possibility* rather than physical *actuality*. The

prominence of logic is also reflected in the new balance, or relationship, we find between interpretation and justification in mathematics. When justification now takes the form of interpretation, it is intended to show the logical possibility of the mathematical structure rather than its actualized truth.

Method is thus separated from meaning, or, as Dedekind argues, meaning must follow method rather than vice versa.<sup>79</sup> The so-called Euclidean ideal, that axioms are self-evident truths reflecting the prior meanings of the basic terms, has moved toward a more modern, formal, and, to a certain extent, structuralist conception of mathematics already between 1790 and 1870. This holds for each of our three domains. Geometric truth moved from being strictly Euclidean to being associated with various possible geometric structures. (The development of projective geometry in our period, and group theory applied to geometry just after, only reinforces this shift.) Algebra is now seen as an abstract symbolic system with no one “true” structure either. Here, as well, the rules are structure *determining*, with Peacock himself stating clearly: “interpretation will *follow*, and not *precede*, the operations of algebra and their results.”<sup>80</sup> Analysis more subtly shows the effect of the wedge between meaning and method via the emphasis on method in the operations fixing “pure” mathematical meanings for infinitesimals and the like. This reversal in the relationship between meaning and method is a thoroughly twentieth-century idea, culminating in conventionalism and formalism.

After our period the emphasis on rigor, abstraction, and the new relationship between meaning and method spawns two opposite reactions in mathematics and its philosophy. On the one hand, there are those who want to carry it even further, resulting in the programs of logicism and formalism (or axiomatics) associated with Frege, Russell, Hilbert, and the later Dedekind. On the other hand, there is a backlash against rigor from those who felt it was going too far, associated with Poincaré, Helmholtz, Lie, and Klein. But this, much better known, story must be left to others.

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<sup>79</sup> Dedekind, “On the Introduction of New Functions in Mathematics.”

<sup>80</sup> Peacock (1833), quoted in Ewald, *From Kant to Hilbert*, 319.

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### **III**

## **NATURE**





## CONCEPTIONS OF THE NATURAL WORLD, 1790–1870

ALEXANDER RUEGER

The first issue of *Nature*, the British weekly journal of science, opened in 1869 with an article by Thomas Huxley, entitled “Nature: Aphorisms by Goethe.” For the most part this consisted of a translation of a short piece from 1781, from a period in which Goethe’s interest in the sciences had just awakened. It is the vivid expression of “a sort of Pantheism,” a conception of nature as “an unfathomable, unconditional, humorously self-contradictory I . . . underlying the phenomena.” It was, to put it differently, the manifesto of a monistic naturalism, not unlike some of the views the French Enlightenment had produced in works like d’Holbach’s *Système de la nature*: “Nature! We are surrounded and embraced by her: powerless to separate ourselves from her, powerless to penetrate beyond her.” Huxley thought this piece especially fitting to open a journal that “aims to mirror the progress of that fashioning by Nature of a picture of herself, in the mind of man, which we call the progress of Science.”<sup>1</sup>

Whatever else Huxley’s choice of text may reveal about the scientific and philosophical context of the 1870s, it illustrates that a historical view of conceptions of nature during the preceding century will have to focus on developments within a largely German tradition. This focus can be justified by noticing that it is only in this tradition that philosophers placed emphasis on nature as a special aspect of reality that was in need of, and worthy of, philosophical attention – to such a degree, in fact, that the philosophy of nature, at times, became synonymous with philosophy in general. In England and France, by contrast, the dominant philosophical views tended early on toward a methodology of scientific inquiry (Comte, Mill), leaving substantive pronouncements about nature to the sciences themselves. This trend caught on in Germany only somewhat later, around the middle of the century (in part as a reaction to the perceived excesses of *Naturphilosophie*), and then became one of the central tenets of the varieties of neo-Kantianism. The term ‘*Naturphilosophie*’ was generally avoided and the topic itself rarely treated in lectures and seminars

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Henry Huxley, “Nature: Aphorisms by Goethe,” *Nature* 1 (1869): 10.

until toward the end of the century, when scientists-turned-philosophers, like Ostwald and Haeckel, revived it in opposition to academic philosophy.

Each of the major varieties of philosophy of nature, at least in its period of inception, took a distinct group of sciences as its paradigm for knowledge of nature. While Kant gave that role to Newtonian mechanics and the theory of gravity, the *Naturphilosophen* chose the 'Baconian' sciences of chemistry, heat, electricity, and magnetism;<sup>2</sup> for the materialists around 1850, the primary area of interest became biology. This shift in focus from mathematized disciplines to others that had not yet attained this status had considerable repercussions for the respective conceptions of nature.

Our period begins with Kant's proposal for a metaphysics of nature within the framework of transcendental idealism. This proposal he emphatically sought to distinguish from what he perceived as the metaphysical excesses of spiritualism in Leibniz and of monism in Spinoza. The further development of the philosophy of nature at the hands of the post-Kantians, however, turned out to be in many ways a return to Leibnizian and in particular to Spinozistic views. What was attractive for the idealists of the early nineteenth century, in their striving to overcome all sorts of dualisms in philosophy, were precisely the monistic frameworks of seventeenth-century rationalists and of eighteenth-century materialists. With the absorption of these views, repudiated by Kant, post-Kantian *Naturphilosophie* reached its zenith and became the starting point, or at least the background, for virtually all further developments in nineteenth-century philosophizing about nature. It is remarkable how even the representatives of the most determined and polemical reaction against idealism, the 'scientific materialists' of the midcentury, had no difficulty in adopting basic explanatory structures from Schelling and his school. It is to be expected that concepts like 'idealism' and 'realism' become blurry and fluid in historical perspective; during the nineteenth century it appears that the traditional opposition of these positions became increasingly insignificant in comparison with another contrast, that between monism and dualism. In the case of *Naturphilosophie* and materialism, one monism could easily copy structural features from another monism, and the opposition between the

<sup>2</sup> These "Baconian" sciences were primarily experiment- and observation-driven and received mathematization only after c. 1820. See Thomas Kuhn, "Mathematical vs. Experimental Traditions in the Development of Physical Science," in *The Essential Tension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 31–65. For an encyclopedic overview see Manfred Durner, "Theorien der Chemie," in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe. Ergänzungsband zu Werke Band 5–9*, eds. Hans Michael Baumgartner et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994) [henceforth Schelling, HKA Erg], 3–161. Francesco Moiso, "Magnetismus, Elektrizität, Galvanismus," in Schelling, HKA Erg 164–372. Jörg Jantzen, "Physiologische Theorien," in Schelling, HKA Erg 373–668.

two camps boiled down to questions that became seen by many as irrelevant. Philosophical syntheses, attempts at mediating apparently conflicting views about nature, flourished from at least the 1840s on, sometimes under labels like ‘*Idealrealismus*’. Although they did not use this label, the version of materialism that Marx and Engels developed in the second half of the century belongs among such synthesizing efforts.

Another manifestation of the tendency to mediate was the attempt by philosophers such as Lotze to design a position that, on the one hand, conceded to the sciences everything they wanted (e.g., mechanistic explanations of organic processes) while maintaining, on the other hand, that nature was a single spiritual substance, striving toward largely unknown aims and using the ‘mechanism of nature’ as a means to reach those aims. Such peaceful coexistence of idealist and materialist views not only was metaphysically significant; it also addressed a problem that post-Kantian *Naturphilosophie* had already taken up and that characterized even the scientific materialist proposals: the question of how to put our emotional, aesthetic, and moral responses to nature into harmony with the scientific view of nature that increasingly seemed to threaten such responses as insignificant.

#### KANT’S METAPHYSICS OF NATURE

Kant’s views on nature divide, at the surface, into two distinct compartments – matter and living beings – corresponding to two ways of investigating the natural world. The approach to matter resulted in secure (scientific) knowledge because the conditions of the possibility of experience in general coincided with the conditions of the possibility of knowledge of inert matter, thus allowing a constitutive use of the relevant concepts. The cognition regarding living beings, by contrast, had to be based on a merely regulative use of concepts and principles because Kant could not find these among the conditions of experience in general. Concepts like ‘purpose’ or ‘organism’ were necessary for dealing with living beings but were not constitutive for knowledge of outer nature.

Kant introduced ‘metaphysics of nature’ as a technical term into eighteenth-century philosophy. Although the term was defined as comprising the rational doctrines of physiology, cosmology, and theology,<sup>3</sup> he worked out in some detail only the “immanent physiology,” the metaphysics of objects of outer

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B873–4.

sense or “rational physics,” in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (*MAN*) of 1786.

He distinguished the concepts ‘world’ and ‘nature’: the first, “the mathematical whole of all appearances,” is the idea of the sum in space and time of all objects of experience; the second, “the dynamic whole,” is the idea of the unity of the existence of objects of experience, that is, the totality of their interactions under laws of nature (in particular, the law of cause and effect). The idea of nature then can be considered in two respects: *Natura materialiter spectata* is the whole of all objects of experience insofar as they are lawfully connected; *natura formaliter spectata* denotes the “connection of determinations of a thing in accordance with an inner principle of causality,” as in such phrases as “the nature of fire.”<sup>4</sup> The general idea of nature can be further separated into the totality of the objects of inner and of outer sense, that is, into material and mental nature. Nature as the whole of material substances is the topic of Kant’s *MAN*. Once nature is specified as material or corporeal nature, the form-matter distinction can be applied again.<sup>5</sup> The formal aspect of corporeal nature (matter) is subsumed by Kant under the concept of ‘motion’ – insofar as matter can be characterized in terms of motion (“Matter is the movable in space,” etc.), the principles of the understanding can be applied and specified into Kant’s laws of motion, closely related to the three laws of Newton’s mechanics.<sup>6</sup> It is this formal aspect of material nature, namely, that the ‘nature of matter’ can be characterized in terms of motion, that allows the application of mathematics to the analysis of matter and thus grounds an apodictically certain science of material nature. The way in which matter is treated in chemistry and other branches of natural philosophy was, in Kant’s view of 1786, not capable of analogous characterizations – these ‘sciences’ could therefore only be regarded as applied arts; they lacked the certainty, the rational foundation, that we find in mechanics.

The aspect of his overall theory that received the most attention in the years following the publication of the *MAN* was the dynamical theory of matter. That the nature of matter, in dynamical respect, must consist in attractive and repulsive forces Kant concluded from the premises that matter fills space and offers resistance. The nature of these *Grundkräfte* cannot be further elucidated; they are conditions for the possibility of our experience of matter. What the

<sup>4</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B446.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften. 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [henceforth Kant, Ak], 4:467–8.

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), chaps. 3 and 4.

*MAN* aimed to account for is the possibility of matter's "filling a space in a determinate degree,"<sup>7</sup> that is, the possibility of matter of a determinate density. The idea was that material stuff of a particular density is constituted by a particular combination of the basic forces in an equilibrium configuration. Although this sounded like a general recipe for constructing the specific properties of all kinds of different materials, in particular their chemical properties, in terms of differing configurations of the forces, Kant did not think he could go this far without leaving the realm of metaphysics.<sup>8</sup> The general strategy pursued in the *MAN* of 'specifying' the principles of the understanding so as to generate schemata for empirical concepts like matter and thus connecting the transcendental principles with some recognized laws of nature seemed to make it necessary to leave the problem of specific qualities of matter, including the majority of the phenomena that were, at the end of the eighteenth century, clearly the most exciting, including chemical, electric, magnetic, and heat phenomena, to empirical investigation, subsuming the established results of such researches under the title of "special" or "particular laws of nature."<sup>9</sup> But, as many contemporary readers of the *MAN* realized, the advertised superiority of the dynamical approach over the atomistic theory of matter would ultimately have to be established on the basis of precisely the sort of extension of Kant's program against which its author had cautioned.

A further serious and often noticed difficulty arose from Kant's identification of the attractive *Grundkraft* with Newton's universal gravitation. If bodies are equilibrium configurations of the attractive and repulsive forces, how could the attractive force manifest itself as gravitational attraction far away from the surface of the body? Did this phenomenon not show that the attractive force had not been "used up" in balancing the repulsive force at the body's boundary? These problems became central issues a decade later in Schelling's attempt to develop a philosophy of nature. Kant himself struggled with them in various ways in the unfinished *Opus Postumum*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kant, Ak 4:512.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, Ak 4:524.

<sup>9</sup> At the end of the "Dynamics" chapter Kant hinted at an a priori system of the relations of repulsive and attractive force, "which can be thought of without contradicting oneself" – a *Topik* of possible "moments into which the specific differences must be classifiable (without comprehending their possibility)," in other words, an a priori arrangement of concepts that mark the territory of possible empirical discoveries (Kant, Ak 4:525ff.). For a detailed study of Kant's theory of matter see Martin Carrier, "Kants Theorie der Materie und ihre Wirkung auf die zeitgenössische Chemie," *Kant-Studien* 81 (1990): 170–210.

<sup>10</sup> For attempts to understand the content and the significance of Kant's late philosophy of nature, cf. Eckart Förster, *Kant's Final Synthesis: An Essay on The Opus Postumum* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), and Friedman, *Kant*, chap. 5.

The distinction of material and formal aspects of the concept of material nature was not only of architectonic significance. By insisting on this distinction, he placed himself in opposition to philosophers such as Leibniz who had argued that material objects have “substantial forms,” metaphysical principles underlying the mechanical transactions of the bodies, “vital principles” that are accessible only to thought but not to sense perception (and are therefore not dealt with in physics). Kant, by contrast, strictly separated form and substance and thereby excluded any intimation of life from matter. Hylozoism was for him a manifest contradiction in terms because matter must be ‘inert’ in order to apply Newton’s laws of motion to it; the whole approach was famously characterized as “the death of natural philosophy.”<sup>11</sup>

Kant’s own response to the problem of how our knowledge of nature, even though rational foundations could be given only for a small part of it, could nevertheless count as science was given in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*CJ*). Reason demands, as the first *Critique* had stated, that proper science has to have the form of a *system*: “Systematic unity is that which first makes ordinary cognition into science, i.e., makes a system out of a mere aggregate of it.”<sup>12</sup> In the *CJ*, therefore, Kant made an attempt to formulate, within the critical philosophy, a general framework in which the ‘special laws’ of *all* sciences could be seen as parts within such a system. This effort, however, could not be based, like the *MAN*, on principles constitutive for experience but had to resort to the merely regulative maxims of reflective judgment. Nature was to be considered as a system *for* judgment, not, however, objectively. The manifold empirical phenomena must be assumed to organize themselves into a system according to laws even though we do not have insight into the necessity of such laws (since they cannot be deduced from the transcendental laws themselves). Even though these laws were therefore accidental for human understanding, judgment “must . . . assume it as an a priori principle for its own use that what is contingent for human insight in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless contains a lawful unity, not fathomable by us but still thinkable.”<sup>13</sup> In the interest of cognitively orienting ourselves in the natural world (so as to make possible the “thoroughgoing interconnection of empirical cognitions into a whole of experience”),<sup>14</sup> we treat nature *as if* it had been arranged according to a plan, suitable for our cognitive power. This “*formal purposiveness*” of nature, expressed, for instance, in the assumption “that there is in nature a sub-

<sup>11</sup> Kant, Ak 4:544.

<sup>12</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B860.

<sup>13</sup> Kant, Ak 5:183–4.

<sup>14</sup> Kant, Ak 5:183–4.

ordination of genera and species that we can grasp,”<sup>15</sup> amounted to the *regulative* claim of an “agreement of nature with our faculty of cognition.”

In the realm of organic bodies, explanations of the origin and behavior of objects according to the laws of the *MAN* failed because any change, in terms of these laws, had to be referred to *external* causes. Organic bodies, however, displayed change due to internal causes (this is one of the definitions of living beings given by Kant).<sup>16</sup> Following the demands of cognitive orientation, reflective judgment ascribes to nature in such bodies a *material* purposiveness, a “*technic*”<sup>17</sup> – we attribute to nature “our concept of an end for judging its product,” that is, to grasp how the product is possible “in accordance with a law of the connection of causes and effects.”<sup>18</sup>

The obvious problem of how the two approaches to nature – explanation in terms of mechanical laws and judgment in terms of the teleological principle of a technic of nature – could fit together occupied Kant to some length in the *CJ* under the title of the ‘antinomy of teleological judgement’. If teleological judgments, in particular of organic bodies, are necessary for our cognitive power and thus are based on an a priori principle, how could it be a matter of *empirical* research to find out in any particular case of a given body whether it can legitimately be explained in mechanical terms (in terms of effects and external causes) or whether a teleological approach (attributing internal causes) is appropriate? Kant insisted that we are obliged to apply mechanical laws to the greatest possible extent, but it seems an empirical question of how far this application reaches.<sup>19</sup> And furthermore, can we consistently apply *both* views to the same objects? Perhaps, if they are both considered as regulative rules. But despite what Kant sometimes asserted in the *CJ*, the mechanical mode of explanation, according to the first *Critique* and the *MAN*, does not represent a merely regulative maxim of judgment but is constitutive for experience.

The dissolution of these tensions Kant sought in an appeal to what lies beyond all possible experience, analogous to the strategy of resolving the antinomies (of reason) in the first *Critique*: We can consistently think of the mechanical and the teleological approaches as arising from, and being unified in, a further principle as long as we posit it “in what lies outside of both [other principles] (hence outside of the possible empirical representation of nature).” This is the supersensible, which we must regard as the ground of nature as

<sup>15</sup> Kant, Ak 5:185.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kant, Ak 4:544.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, Ak 20:204.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, Ak 5:193; 20:234. On Kant’s views on the nature of living beings see, e.g., Reinhard Löw, *Philosophie des Lebendigen: Der Begriff des Organischen bei Kant* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B555.



phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> Of this supersensible substratum, of course, we can form only an indeterminate concept – but that should be enough to ensure us that a unification of the two principles in a third is possible and that we can, therefore, investigate products of nature according to both modes of explanation without fear of contradiction. The merely thinkable ground of nature, then, possesses a productivity – causality would not be the appropriate term – that manifests itself at the phenomenal level as mechanical causality and, in organic bodies, as if these were caused according to purposes.

Although Kant often expressed himself in ways that suggested that when we regard a natural object as a purpose of nature we impose on nature a mode of operation in analogy to what we experience in ourselves as a power to act according to purposes, he qualified this by stressing that, strictly speaking, such an analogy lacks any ground. We cannot think natural purposes in analogy to human art because artifacts unavoidably presuppose a designer different from them; hence, for the analogy to hold, a cause different from nature would have to be assumed for organic products. But these products are to be considered as parts of nature. The most one could say, therefore, is that in such objects we find a “remote analogy” with our own causality in terms of purposes.<sup>21</sup> The analogy has to be remote because we cannot have further insight into the productivity that we have to attribute to the supersensible ground of nature.

The question arises to what extent such a necessary reference to an indeterminate substratum of nature affects the whole edifice of Kant’s view of nature. To be sure, the resolution of the antinomies of reason required reference to (“cosmological”) ideas to which no experience could possibly correspond; the program of the *MAN* needed the idea of absolute space,<sup>22</sup> not given in any experience and thus transgressing the boundaries of what Kant had called “immanent physiology.” But in the *CJ*, the problematic objects, organisms, were fully given in experience; they were not to be considered as imaginary end points of sequences of conditions that can never actually be run through.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the extent to which the metaphysics of nature, as a rational foundation for the science of nature, could remain “immanent physiology” and avoid the realm of “transcendent physiology” was unclear. What is clear is that Kant was using two senses of ‘nature’, a narrow and a wide one. There was nature as that of which we can have knowledge because it stands under the laws of the understanding, and there was nature as that of which we can legitimately hardly say anything but that nevertheless has to be presupposed as the

<sup>20</sup> Kant, Ak 5:412, 409.

<sup>21</sup> Kant, Ak 5:375.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, Ak 4:559.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Kant, Ak 5:405.

ultimate ground and origin of everything – including organisms and rational beings. This is the sense of nature – officially used only metaphorically, of course – in which ‘we’ are a part of nature, in which nature itself brings forth beings that are able to form purposes and impose laws. This is “nature in the widest sense,”<sup>24</sup> “freely working [*freiwirkende*] nature,” which makes “all art, and perhaps reason itself, possible.”<sup>25</sup> That such a notion of nature was beyond the bounds of what can make sense to us is clear, for example, from the fact that it would have to contain both, the grounds of necessity as well as of freedom (spontaneity), that it would have to unify the dichotomies Kant had been concerned to identify in order to secure knowledge of nature for us.<sup>26</sup> (In the artistic genius, for example, it is this wide sense of nature that manifests itself in ultimately inscrutable ways.)

## POST-KANTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE:

### SCHELLING AND HIS SCHOOL

In the course of their critical development of Kant’s system, the post-Kantians saw the need to deal more thoroughly with the relation of the two senses of nature than Kant had done – not because they had a mere desire for transcendent insight but rather because philosophers like Fichte and Schelling found that the analysis Kant had provided for the possibility of knowledge could not be satisfactory, that is, could not be completed in the form of a *system*, unless the various manifestations of ‘dualism’ in Kant’s work had been overcome.<sup>27</sup> Because Kant had not succeeded in this task, philosophy after Kant was still seen as involved in a *Systemstreit*, a battle of systems, variously identified as idealism versus realism or criticism versus dogmatism. It was in the context of these debates during the 1790s that Schelling developed the first version of his philosophy of nature – what was to become the single most sustained attempt at crafting a philosophical conception of nature that improved on the Kantian

<sup>24</sup> Kant, Ak 5:375.

<sup>25</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B654.

<sup>26</sup> Beiser has emphasized the sense in which insisting on dualism was necessary to Kant to defend critical philosophy against Herder’s naturalism. Cf. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 153ff.

<sup>27</sup> An excellent overview of the post-Kantian period is given by Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002). On Schelling, specifically see Kuno Fischer, *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1895); Wolfgang Wieland, “Die Anfänge der Philosophie Schellings und die Frage nach der Natur,” in *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen*, eds. Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz (1967; Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 237–79; Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Anton Hain, 1991).

view by going beyond it, not just speculatively but in close contact with developments in those very sciences that Kant himself had not been able or willing to accommodate in his theory.

Kant had seen the unity of nature, “nature in the widest sense,” in an unknowable supersensible substratum in which, precisely because it could not be an object of knowledge, the principles of reason and of the understanding could coincide. This separation of what reason demands from what the understanding can vindicate led to the merely regulative status of teleological claims about nature. The young Schelling, in 1795, claimed that the mechanical and the teleological organization could indeed not be realized in the same object. The unity of the two principles, however, had to be presupposed – not as an object of knowledge but as a principle underlying the possibility of our experience of any object. Schelling – still working within the framework of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* – called the higher principle the “absolute I.” For the absolute I, unity of the conflicting principles is *constitutive*; the unity is *immanent*; for the empirical I, by contrast, the unity is a merely *regulative* maxim of *objective* unity.<sup>28</sup>

With respect to the absolute I, as with respect to “nature in the widest sense,” teleology would thus be immanent, not imposed in virtue of peculiarities and limitations of our understanding. What was for Kant a “remote analogy” between the productivity of nature and our own ability to act according to purposes could, from the point of view of the absolute I, be taken literally: organic products, that is, could be taken as examples of the unification of concepts (purposes) and reality. But this transformation of Kant’s view required more than simply and illegitimately using regulative principles in a constitutive way. It required a revision of the framework that determined the meaning of ‘constitutive’ and ‘regulative’.

As Kant already indicated, principles are constitutive and regulative only with respect to an aim or a cognitive faculty: the analogies of experience, for instance, are regulative with respect to intuitions (i.e., for sensibility) but constitutive for experience (for the understanding).<sup>29</sup> Similarly, teleological principles were merely regulative for experience (with respect to our understanding) but could be constitutive with respect to some other form of cognition (a different understanding). The problem, for Schelling, was to show that such a different sort of cognition or understanding was not just speculatively thinkable (as Kant said)<sup>30</sup> but was actually necessitated by our own claims to have knowledge.

<sup>28</sup> Schelling, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*. Eds. Hans Michael Baumgartner et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1976–) [henceforth Schelling, HKA], I, 2:174–5.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B223, 692.

<sup>30</sup> Kant, Ak 5:401ff.

The absolute I is the unconditioned ground on which the empirical I and the objects differentiate themselves from each other. Hence, the absolute I itself cannot be thought of as either an object or a subject. In particular, it cannot have objective validity because it is supposed to make objectively valid knowledge possible in the first place. The principle, then, is “an *immanent* principle of pre-established harmony in which freedom and nature are identical.”<sup>31</sup> This harmony, Schelling argued, is required for the possibility of ‘real’ knowledge. Such knowledge depends – as exemplified in the self-knowledge of conscious minds – on the identity of representation and object. In order to demonstrate that we have ‘real’ knowledge of objects in general, one would therefore have to show that “the mind only intuits *itself* when it intuits objects in general.”<sup>32</sup> In this case, representation and object can coincide because the object (the mind itself) displays structures that correspond to what we find on the side of the subject itself. Since the mind has to represent itself as an object with ‘productive power’, namely, the power to produce representations, and thus as an object that is at the same time cause and effect of itself, “a nature that organizes itself,” organization also has to be found in general in the objects of our knowledge. “Since there is in our mind an infinite tendency to organize itself, a general tendency to organization must also be found in the external world. This is indeed the case. The system of the world is a kind of organization that has formed out of a common center.”<sup>33</sup> Understanding the world as an organized system was no longer an imposition due to limitations of the human understanding but a full-blown condition of the possibility of the ‘reality’ of knowledge.

Furthermore, the philosophical demonstration that nature as the object of the sciences is ultimately a reflection of what lies underneath or before the separation of subject (mind) and object (nature) would enable us, as Schelling wrote in 1795, finally to return from the “unnatural state of speculation” to the “enjoyment, and to the study, of nature.”<sup>34</sup> The philosophy of nature thus would become a significant part of a general movement that saw the role of philosophy in facilitating progress – in the sense of overcoming the separations and the deficiencies of the current age through speculation, thereby restoring the “serenity and purity of the Greek contemplation of nature” at a new level.<sup>35</sup>

In the tripartite organization of Kant’s table of categories Schelling found the clearest indication for a general scheme of organization that our mind

<sup>31</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 2:174.

<sup>32</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 4:85.

<sup>33</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 4:113.

<sup>34</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 3:111.

<sup>35</sup> Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–61) [henceforth Schelling, SW], 5:121.

follows, the “original dualism in the human mind”: everything we intuit and know has to be constructed out of opposites. This was of far-reaching consequence because it opened the prospect of a ‘construction’ of all of nature after the fashion of Kant’s dynamic theory of matter: “Not only the possibility of matter and of a world system in general but also the whole mechanism and organism of nature lead us back to this duality of principles.”<sup>36</sup> This was, in a nutshell, the program of Schelling’s philosophy of nature for the following years. In particular, the note he added to the previous quotation sketched something like a research program, to be carried out in the *Ideen* (1797) and the *Weltseele* (1798). On the basis of current scientific results, one should expect, he noted, that all phenomena that so far have not been explained in science will ultimately be understood as arising out of interactions of solid bodies with a (as yet not well-understood) subtle fluid, an ether, filling the universe. What we know about this fluid is that it appears “in the most varied forms but as *active* always only in its *decomposition* (into positive and negative substances).”<sup>37</sup>

The project of establishing the “immanent pre-established harmony” of subject and world must have looked especially promising to Schelling given the results of contemporary natural science – the plethora of the recently investigated ‘dualistic’ phenomena of electricity, magnetism, chemistry, and heat and their suggested explanations seemed almost visually to present the sought-for indications of productive activity in the inorganic realm and thus the postulated correspondences between mind and nature. If someone would only collect and summarize the recent discoveries in science, Schelling claimed, this would be sufficient to end the “pitiful era” (*Jammerepoche*) of post-Kantian philosophy.<sup>38</sup> “What we see happening daily before our eyes cannot be doubted. There is productive force in things outside of us. Such a force, however, has to be the force of a mind.”<sup>39</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed, independently of Schelling, in many publications of the time.<sup>40</sup>

The first task in demonstrating that nature in general had the structure of an organism and was thus analogous to the mind was to show that, and how, the manifold of diverse observable phenomena could be the product of an underlying unity, a uniform principle of production. In particular, this principle would have to allow a dynamic construction of the specific qualities of matter

<sup>36</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 4:135.

<sup>37</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 4:135.

<sup>38</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 4:63n.

<sup>39</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 4:114; cf. also SW 10:121.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Franz von Baader, *Vom Wärmestoff* (1786), in *Sämtliche Werke*, eds. Franz Hoffmann et al. (Leipzig: Bethmann, 1852), 3:41.

and thereby move the science of chemistry (as well as electricity and magnetism) into the scope of the theory.

Attempts at unifying the phenomena, in more or less fantastic ways, under one overarching principle were very frequent at Schelling's time, and their basic structure was often similar; with respect to this structure it did not matter so much whether somebody explained everything in terms of a duality of fundamental forces, in terms of opposed imponderable fluids, or in terms of powers of the mind. This structure was taken from chemistry and the doctrine of latent heat, not from mechanics anymore: it is the continuous process of alternating decompositions and recombinations of a substance, usually a 'subtle fluid', an ether, or caloric itself. This fluid (A) would decompose into two different substances (B, C), which then could recombine to form A again:  $A \rightarrow B + C \rightarrow A$ . (Water vapor, for example, can be decomposed into liquid water and caloric, which together form vapor again.) What are directly observable, so the doctrine went, are usually only the products of the decomposition (such as water); the original substance itself may not be noticeable (such as water vapor in the air before it rains). This kind of schema had been used frequently, and Lichtenberg, around 1790, had even speculated that it might be the "proper soul of the world" (*die eigentliche Weltseele*).<sup>41</sup> Kant himself (1795) in fact had made use of it when he tried to devise a corporeal analogon to the mind's ability to keep sense impressions *separate* and *unify* them into one experience. He speculated that what would be needed for this task is a matter in the brain that "is continually becoming organized [because of decomposition] without ever being organized [because of subsequent recombination]" – an apparent solution to the problem of how the observed heterogeneity of phenomena can be due to an underlying originally undifferentiated, homogeneous whole.<sup>42</sup> This general scheme, taken from contemporary science, served as the basic tool in Schelling's initial attempts to characterize the productivity of nature, the *natura naturans*, as he soon calls it, following Spinoza: "The infinite activity of nature," he wrote, consists in the "continuous alteration of combining and decomposing processes."<sup>43</sup>

As neatly as this scheme may have seemed to fit into a generalization of the Kantian dynamic framework, serious problems remained or newly arose for

<sup>41</sup> Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Wolfgang Promies (Munich: Hanser, 1971), 2:246–7; cf. also Baader, *Vom Wärmestoff*, 3:30, 40–1; Baader, *Beiträge zur Elementarphysiologie* (1797), in *Sämtliche Werke*, 3:226n.; Durner, "Theorien der Chemie," 146ff.; and Moiso, "Magnetismus." For further discussion of how Kant used the schema, cf. Alexander Rueger, "Brain Water, the Ether, and the Art of Constructing Systems," *Kant-Studien* 86 (1995): 26–40.

<sup>42</sup> Kant, Ak 12:32; 13:410; cf. also Ak 8:317–24.

<sup>43</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 7:99.

Schelling. He had to admit that the construction of specific qualities of bodies was still beyond the reach of his theory. Furthermore, around 1798, he realized that the idea of two opposed forces constituting matter in their equilibrium led to the consequence that, by accomplishing their equilibrium constellation, the forces would be “exhausted” and could not act further beyond the constituted body. This immediately indicated that the ‘penetrating’ force of gravitation could not be identified with the attractive basic force.<sup>44</sup> More generally, the dilemma Schelling faced was this: On the one hand, the existence of material bodies required that the constituting forces are able to balance each other – a sort of stability is needed, or, as Schelling says, *Hemmungspunkte*, where nature’s productivity seems to rest;<sup>45</sup> on the other hand, in order to explain the diversity of actual bodies and their development, the forces had to remain ‘productive’ even after they have established a specific degree of filling a space – which seemed to exclude their complete balance or exhaustion.

What may appear as problems of detail in the grand scheme, however, turned out to lead to a significant modification of the general theory. Schelling solved the problem of exhaustion by (1) realizing that in addition to the two fundamental forces needed in the construction of matter a third one was required that could assist in determining the opposition of the two others into a product and still operate beyond the confines of this product; this third basic force Schelling saw in gravity, and thus he rejected the Kantian identification of gravity with the attractive fundamental force.<sup>46</sup> He established the tripartite form of the construction of matter in general by developing one force out of the other in analogy to the geometric succession of line, surface, and volume; because of this analogy, the forces were now labeled magnetism, electricity, and gravity<sup>47</sup> (not to be confused with the phenomenal forces of these names; see later discussion). (2) The next step in overcoming the problem of exhaustion was to postulate a hierarchy of levels (“potencies”) at which the process of construction just outlined is structurally reproduced but with different original ingredients (the “dynamical process”). Whereas the construction of matter, or “nature in general,” started from the original opposition of forces and ends

<sup>44</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 7:141–2; SW 4:26ff.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Schelling, HKA I, 7:82–3; SW 3:287.

<sup>46</sup> The basic repulsive force needs to be limited to a definite degree so as to be able to fill space of a determinate volume; the basic attractive force is thus needed to balance the repulsion, but this attraction itself also needs to be limited to a definite degree. This can be accomplished only, Schelling argued, if a limitation from “outside” the two forces is assumed, i.e., a limitation by other bodies: “the attractive force of each body is limited to a certain degree by that of every other body.” What is needed, then, for constructing space filled to a definite degree is “the universal concatenation of all matter among itself,” i.e., universal gravitational interaction (Schelling, SW 4:29).

<sup>47</sup> Suggestions of this sort already in Baader, *Beiträge*, 223–4.

with matter, the next level began with matter and “reproduces its production” under an analogous set of “categories”: the magnetic, electric, and chemical process. It is only at this second potency that we find the phenomenal forces of electricity, and so on, as well as the specific qualities of matter in inorganic nature. Now Schelling believed he had finally found the principle for the construction of differences in qualities in material bodies, namely, “in the different relations of bodies to those three functions.”<sup>48</sup> The products of the second potency, in turn, are the raw material for the third level, at which, under the categories of sensibility, irritability, and reproduction, organic nature is constructed. (A further potency would then lead from organisms to mental life.) With this dialectical construction of the unfolding of nature<sup>49</sup> Schelling could claim to have solved the “basic task of the system,” that is, to show “how productivity gradually materializes itself and modifies itself into ever more stable products, which would then result in a dynamic sequence of levels in nature [*dynamische Stufenfolge*].”<sup>50</sup>

Because it was Schelling’s aim to investigate what lies *behind* the subject-object dichotomy and generates this separation, constitutive for empirical science, in the first place, he was not referring to the physical phenomena of magnetism, electricity, and so forth, when he used these terms. Magnetism and the others, as the “categories of nature,” were different from magnetism and the others as displayed in experiments because those categories of nature were supposed to make experience of nature possible and hence could not themselves directly appear as objects of experience. Observed magnetism thus was an expression of a category at the phenomenal level. If many of Schelling’s claims about such categories sound so strange, it is partly because he did not sufficiently emphasize the difference in meaning of the terms depending on the level at which they were considered. What justified for Schelling the use of the same labels is the analogy (or “symbolic hypotyposis” in Kant’s sense)<sup>51</sup> between the empirical features of, for example, magnetism and the features of the more basic first category.

The evolutionary process, the “*Stufenfolge der Natur*,” Schelling claimed in 1799/1800, could be viewed from two perspectives, a transcendental and a properly nature-philosophic one. In the transcendental view, the subject and its activity were taken as the ground for “how the idea of . . . a nature first arose

<sup>48</sup> Schelling, SW 4:51.

<sup>49</sup> Some have seen in this development the birth of idealist dialectics in the proper sense that Hegel later adopted: Werner Hartkopf, *Studien zur Entwicklung der modernen Dialektik* (Meisenheim: Hain, 1972); Panagiotis Kondylis, *Die Entstehung der Dialektik* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1979), 575ff.

<sup>50</sup> Schelling, SW 3:302, 321.

<sup>51</sup> Kant Ak 5:351–2.



in us,” and the sequence of levels appeared as the stages in the transcendental “history of self consciousness.”<sup>52</sup> In the other reading of *Stufenfolge*, which Schelling preferred from 1800/01 on, the hierarchy of levels reflects the gradual evolution (*Steigerung, Potenzierung*) of the undifferentiated subject-object, nature itself, into the subject.<sup>53</sup> At each level of this process, we have unities of objective and subjective, “real” and “ideal,” moments; there is nothing merely objective or merely subjective in nature. Only relative to a higher level, in relation to something “ideal” (from the standpoint of the lower level), do natural products appear “real.” Nature, thus, was given priority because “the knowing subject has the knowable object as its necessary condition”;<sup>54</sup> *Naturphilosophie* in this sense describes the “self-construction” of nature and provides, in a famous phrase, the “physical explanation of idealism.”<sup>55</sup> *Naturphilosophie* was no longer a complement to transcendental idealism but took on the role of the foundational discipline. With this turn the idea of the immanent preestablished harmony between mind and nature and the associated nature-as-organism picture lost their guiding function. This picture had been central as long as the starting point for *Naturphilosophie* was the transcendental question, How does nature have to look in order for the subject to have ‘real’ knowledge of nature? The dynamical process could now serve as the fundamental schema according to which nature constructed itself and could guarantee a connection between the lowest levels of nature and the workings of organisms at higher levels.<sup>56</sup>

But also in this new perspective Schelling emphasized that one must not imagine the evolutionary process as if “nature really runs through those moments in time”; the sequence of levels is rather to be understood as “dynamically grounded in nature,” and all the levels or moments are simultaneous and not actually separated. Causal relations between levels, as would be required by evolution by descent, are explicitly excluded.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Schelling, HKA I, 5:107; SW 3:453.

<sup>53</sup> The process takes place, however, as a construction within the philosophizing subject. Schelling distinguishes the “philosophical I” from the “objective I”: it is the former that constructs the development of the latter out of nature up to the point or level at which the objective I becomes identical to the philosophical (Schelling, SW 4:87; 10:106).

<sup>54</sup> Schelling, SW 10:229.

<sup>55</sup> Schelling, SW 4:96–7, 76–7.

<sup>56</sup> In 1799 (*Erster Entwurf*) Schelling “deduced” the inorganic sphere of nature from an organism’s requirements for a supporting (inorganic) environment (e.g., Schelling, HKA I 7:134); the organism idea was clearly the guiding principle. By 1800 (*Allgemeine Deduction*) he could present the dynamic process within the inorganic sphere and indicate how it would lead up to the organic level.

<sup>57</sup> Schelling, SW 4:25, 135, 207–8. Similar claims are found in Hegel’s philosophy of nature: G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke: Theorieverkausgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970–) [henceforth Hegel, *Werke*], 9:31–2, 397ff. Zusatz. Robert J. Richards (*The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* [Chicago: University of

In the transcendental reading the doctrine may have seemed safe against an interpretation in terms of an evolution *in time*. But the self-construction-of-nature version, Schelling's intention notwithstanding, could be read by others as a real evolutionary scheme. In Lorenz Oken's views on nature the transition from the noncausal hierarchical structure envisaged in *Naturphilosophie* to a causal-developmental view can be clearly traced. Thus Oken speculated famously about an evolution of human beings out of marine life-forms and even about the original formation of life itself out of "primordial slime points": set in darkness (soil), these develop into plants; set in light (water or air), they become animals.<sup>58</sup> Since he believed the galvanic process to be the life-sustaining principle, it seemed that a galvanic pile, "ground to atomic pieces, should become alive. In this way nature develops organic bodies."<sup>59</sup> Schelling's principle of immanent preestablished harmony received at Oken's hands early on a peculiar, almost materialist interpretation: "The universe is only *one* animal; its sensorium commune or self consciousness is the human body, its brain are the animals, its sensory organs the plants, its body everything else what you call inorganic. There is nowhere disconnection. . . . The brain extends itself in the sensory nerves, these extend themselves in their organs, these into their objects, and these in turn extend themselves into the infinity of the universe."<sup>60</sup>

At the beginning of our period Kant had banned hylozoism as the death of all philosophy of nature. The development that took his metaphysics of nature as its point of departure, however, from early on understood his theory of matter differently. Thus, Baader wrote that with the dynamical view, Kant had "as if through a healthy breath of life destroyed all matter *brute*, and all that exists in nature is matter *vive*."<sup>61</sup> Philosophers of nature moved more and more into the direction of views that either allowed spontaneous generation of life out of

Chicago Press, 2002], 298ff.) has argued that Schelling was a "dynamic evolutionist" because "his metaphysical idealism had to be realized in time, which meant that the archetypal relationships . . . had to unfold gradually over the course of ages" (311). Richards notes that Schelling's statements from 1798 clearly suggest a historical development while a year later he seems to lean more toward a merely "ideal" sequence of species. Richards argues against the possibility that a "grand cleavage in Schelling's philosophy" occurred within one year (299). Given Schelling's turn to an "absolute" philosophy of nature in this period, the emphasis on the dynamical process instead of the universal organism, and his persistent reminders that all levels in nature are simultaneous, I do not think the cleavage hypothesis to be implausible. Furthermore, if the *Stufenfolge* of organic beings had to be realized in time, then one should expect the same for analogous constructions in the anorganic realm. But it seems hardly plausible to suppose that Schelling intended, e.g., gravity to be a temporally later product of magnetism.

<sup>58</sup> Lorenz Oken, *Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie*, 3rd ed. (Zürich: Schulthess, 1843), 269.

<sup>59</sup> Oken, *Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie*, 149.

<sup>60</sup> Lorenz Oken, *Über das Universum als Fortsetzung des Sinnensystems* (Jena: Frommann, 1808), 10.

<sup>61</sup> Franz von Baader, *Ideen über Festigkeit und Flüssigkeit zur Prüfung der physikalischen Grundsätze des Herrn Lavoisier* (1792), in *Sämtliche Werke*, 3:185n.

matter or avoided the problem by postulating all matter to be equipped with at least aspects of life. Schelling himself tried to reconcile Kant's verdict with *Naturphilosophie*: the 'dead' matter Kant was thinking of was only the remnant of the original productive matter at a higher level of the *Stufenfolge*; while the original ("geistige") matter had all the conditions for the development of life in it, Kantian matter was a 'late' product of the general dynamical process and showed indeed no signs of life.<sup>62</sup>

Schelling retired from the active pursuit of philosophy of nature in 1806, but the influence of some of his ideas on philosophers and scientists remained strong. Schopenhauer's *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, written in 1818, for instance, constructed the levels of the objectification of the will in clear analogy to Schelling's *Stufenfolge* and identified the will with *natura naturans*.<sup>63</sup> Hegel took over many characteristic features of *Naturphilosophie* and translated and integrated them into the development of the Idea, which, at the end of his *Logic*, "releases nature freely" out of itself.<sup>64</sup> After this release, nature – the Idea in its otherness – runs through a hierarchy of levels clearly modeled after Schelling's earlier system.<sup>65</sup>

In 1803 Fries critically evaluated Schelling's early nature-philosophical works as an admirable synthesis of scientific knowledge, which Schelling, however, had misunderstood as a priori deductions of laws of nature. What one finds in his works, said Fries, are rather "combinations of experiences . . . , a duplicating narration of the experiences themselves in a modified language."<sup>66</sup> This is a perceptive observation because it points to two important features of *Naturphilosophie*: (1) the fact that idealistic theory structures seemed to fit naturally onto some of the most advanced developments of contemporary experimental science, thus encouraging the original project of demonstrating a preestablished harmony of mind and nature; and (2) to what I take to be (at least part of) the explanation for the surprisingly positive initial reception of those works: they could be read as a well-informed overview of contemporary knowledge and as a more or less plausible suggestion for a coherent comprehensive interpretation: plausible, because it did not differ fundamentally from other attempts of the time – as long as one was willing to abstract from the philosophical superstructure.

<sup>62</sup> Schelling, SW 4:208; 3:453.

<sup>63</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, vols. 2–3, ed. A. Hübscher (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1965), 1:154ff., 171–2; 2:655.

<sup>64</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 6:573; 8:393; 9:23–4 Zusatz.

<sup>65</sup> For a detailed discussion of the development of Hegel's philosophy of nature see Wolfgang Bonsiepen, *Die Begründung einer Naturphilosophie bei Kant, Schelling, Fries und Hegel* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1997), with further references to the literature.

<sup>66</sup> Jakob Friedrich Fries, *Reinhold, Fichte und Schelling* (1803), in *Sämtliche Schriften*, eds. Gert König et al. (Aalen: Scientia, 1978), 24:188.

THE AFTERMATH OF *NATURPHILOSOPHIE* AND THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENTIFIC MATERIALISM

By the early 1820s the reputation of *Naturphilosophie* was waning, and it became de rigueur to distance oneself from this sort of speculation. By 1830, Hegel had to introduce his Berlin lectures on the subject with an apology for lecturing on a subject that has obviously fallen out of favor.<sup>67</sup> During the 1820s, complaints about the damaging influence of *Naturphilosophie* on science were frequent and indicate that *Naturphilosophie* had been taken up by scientists at least to some extent.<sup>68</sup> What is interesting, however, is that the decline of recognition of German science was blamed not directly on the philosophers but on those scientists who thought themselves competent to “play philosophers.” Scientists, wrote the young Justus Liebig, had enough to do to keep up with the increasingly unmanageable extent of information in their own specialties; it is the philosophizing scientist who gives a ridiculous and embarrassing performance.<sup>69</sup> The real complaint, thus, was about academics’ trespassing boundaries of competence. This, of course, reflected the increasing institutional differentiation of disciplines at the time. And it contrasts sharply with the earlier role of *Naturphilosophie* in the Prussian university reform: because of the perceived association of the natural sciences with *Naturphilosophie* around 1800, it became feasible to integrate those sciences together with philosophy into the prestigious Philosophical Faculty.<sup>70</sup> Scientists who sympathized, if only from a distance, with *Naturphilosophie*, such as Alexander von Humboldt, were influential in this integration, which raised the academic status of the sciences. This initial phase of association, however, soon gave way to a phase of rapidly growing autonomy and significance of the sciences that had no parallel in the simultaneous development of philosophy. By 1855 a scientist such as Helmholtz could require that philosophers, at least in their contacts with the sciences, restrict themselves to an analysis of the epistemological foundations of scientific knowledge, a business that Helmholtz believed to have been the valuable core of Kant’s endeavors.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Hegel, Werke 9:9 Zusatz.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Christa Jungnickel and Russell McCormach, *The Intellectual Mastery of Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1:28, and Kenneth Caneva’s (“Physics and Naturphilosophie: A Reconnaissance,” *History of Science* 35 [1997]: 35–106) detailed study of the influence of *Naturphilosophie* on physicists.

<sup>69</sup> Justus von Liebig, Letter to August von Platen, May 23, 1823, in August von Platen, *Der Briefwechsel*, eds. Ludwig von Scheffler and Paul Bornstein (Hildesheim: Olms, 1973), 1:88–89.

<sup>70</sup> Rudolf Stichweh, *Zur Entstehung des modernen Systems wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 454ff.

<sup>71</sup> Hermann von Helmholtz, “Über das Sehen des Menschen” (1855), in *Vorträge und Reden*, 5th ed. (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1903), 1:85–118.

The formulation of *substantive* philosophical conceptions of nature was now considered a fruitless and misconceived pursuit.<sup>72</sup>

Thus the pursuit of philosophy as *Erkenntnistheorie*, or *Wissenschaftstheorie*, was one response to the sunken reputation of the speculative systems. Other responses that did not constrain themselves to questions of method and knowledge but did develop metaphysical conceptions of nature were (1) the 'scientific materialist' movement (e.g., Moleschott, Büchner, Czolbe), (2) the 'dialectic materialism' of Marx and Engels, and (3) the various attempts at designing a new synthesis of scientific knowledge and idealism (e.g., Fechner, Lotze). With the exception of Marx and Engels, representatives of these movements published around midcentury grand philosophical syntheses of scientific views of nature:<sup>73</sup> Moleschott came out with the *Kreislauf des Lebens* in 1852, Buechner and Czolbe with *Kraft und Stoff* and *Neue Darstellung des Sensualismus* in 1855, and Lotze started the *Mikrokosmos* in 1856. What these otherwise very heterogeneous publications shared was the intention to provide overviews on large parts of current scientific literature under more or less pronounced philosophical points of view, to identify a unity in the variety of natural phenomena that would support the respective philosophical doctrine. The ideas of reducing the world to an interplay of forces and matter, of a hierarchy of levels of development, and of integrating the human mind into the rest of nature are all familiar from *Naturphilosophie*. It turned out that all these ideas could easily be adapted to different philosophical frameworks. These grand syntheses also demonstrate how urgent the desire around 1850 was to find a view of nature that connected science with emotional appeal, with aesthetic (Lotze), moral (Moleschott, Buechner, Czolbe), and religious interests (Lotze).

### *Scientific Materialism*

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the materialist opposition to academic philosophy around 1850 became the new home of the philosophy of nature. One of the inspirations of the materialist movement was the late Schelling's critique of Hegel's system, in particular, the charge that, because Hegel develops nature out of the analysis of the Idea itself, nature never actually leaves the

<sup>72</sup> A similar conclusion had been reached by the first German Philosophers' Congress of 1847: it officially adopted the view that the time of the grand speculative systems was over and that philosophy should concentrate on investigating the foundations of knowledge. Cf. Klaus Christian Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 101–5.

<sup>73</sup> Perhaps the most famous specimen of this literary genre, Humboldt's *Kosmos*, had begun publication in 1845. Humboldt, however, did not present a clear philosophical agenda. He has often been regarded as a cautious sympathizer of *Naturphilosophie* even though he explicitly kept a distance from philosophical doctrines.

realm of logic and therefore is affected with a “lack of being.”<sup>74</sup> The Idea in its otherness remained ideal and did not acquire reality; Hegel, Schelling complained, had not taken the step that would make nature the real ground of all development, including the development of the mind. Whatever the merits of this criticism may be, through Schelling’s lectures it made a deep impression on Young Hegelians, like Feuerbach and Marx, who associated Schelling’s line of objection with a reading of his *Naturphilosophie* in materialistic terms. Thus Feuerbach suggested that one could easily dispense with the absolute subject-object as the ground of all being in philosophy of nature since the Absolute could not possibly become an object of knowledge; nothing then, he argued, stood in the way of taking Schelling’s nature as a “resurrection of nature” in a sensualist understanding (“*Wiederherstellung der Natur überhaupt*”).<sup>75</sup> This was the sense in which scientific materialists like Moleschott, stimulated by Feuerbach, conceived of nature.<sup>76</sup>

Midcentury materialism focused on the phenomena of life; its main authors were physiologists and physicians writing philosophical tracts against philosophy and constructing a metaphysical system under the pretense of avoiding all metaphysics. Moleschott and Büchner saw their claims as continuous with scientific knowledge while in effect they were reproducing doctrines of eighteenth-century materialism.<sup>77</sup> Nature, according to their view, is matter in motion, matter equipped with forces. The main task for the materialists then was to fit biological and mental phenomena into this framework, in particular the more recent discoveries in physiology; furthermore, a reconstruction or translation of idealistic tenets into the materialist alternative had to be accomplished, including the issues of immortality, thought, and morals.

Teleological explanations generally were rejected, and, at a time when Darwin’s doctrine had not yet been received, in its place the materialists set the claim that what looked like purposive behavior or development was nothing but the result of increasingly complex physical and chemical processes.<sup>78</sup> Since

<sup>74</sup> For example, Schelling, SW 10:151ff., 212–13; cf. Manfred Frank, *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975).

<sup>75</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, “Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie” (1839), in *Sämtliche Werke*, eds. Wilhelm Bolin and Friedrich Jodl (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1959), 2:191–2.

<sup>76</sup> On Feuerbach’s relation to scientific materialism cf. Wolfgang Iefèvre, “Wissenschaft und Philosophie bei Feuerbach,” in *Sinnlichkeit und Rationalität*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 81–100.

<sup>77</sup> As their opponents were quick to point out: cf., e.g., Friedrich Albert Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1875) (Leipzig: Reclam, 1905), 2:122ff. For the political background to the movement cf. Köhnke, *Entstehung*; Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977).

<sup>78</sup> For example, Ludwig Büchner, *Kraft und Stoff: Empirisch-naturphilosophische Studien* (1855), in *Vogt, Moleschott, Büchner: Schriften zum kleinbürgerlichen Materialismus in Deutschland*, ed. Dieter Wittich (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), 2:382, 439.

only the simpler forms of such processes are known in detail, one had to rely on an inductive inference to what might result from more complicated arrangements of these factors; all things considered, these inferences seemed better justified than accounts in terms of purposes. Matter, force, and motion as the sole ingredients of the world, however, still would leave open the possibility of 'special' forces, in particular, a vital force, responsible for the peculiarities of organic systems. But vital force could be excluded, argued Moleschott, because (i) atoms have invariant qualities (among them the forces they exert) that do not depend on the arrangements with other atoms in which they find themselves, and (ii) matter and force are conserved; hence, the ultimate parts of matter do not acquire new features when placed in different arrangements.<sup>79</sup> What had to account for organic and also 'higher' functions such as consciousness and thought was the seemingly unlimited ability of the basic chemical processes to form more and more complex products. Chemical affinity, said Moleschott, is the "creative all-power,"<sup>80</sup> or, in Büchner's phrase, matter is the "mother that gives birth to all." Even though vital forces had to be rejected, matter for the materialists was not 'dead' but "full of active life . . . capable of developing the highest thoughts in the living creatures which evolve out of it level by level."<sup>81</sup> On the basis of recent insights into the metabolisms of organisms, Moleschott pictured all of nature as a gigantic system of metabolic processes, as a continuous circulation of chemical ingredients. This, he claimed, was the great "natural miracle," namely, "the eternal existence of matter through its changing forms, . . . the variation from form to form, . . . the metabolism as the *Urgrund* of terrestrial life."<sup>82</sup> (Even the foundation of a naturalist ethics was supposed to be contained in this doctrine.)

The materialists, rejecting teleology and vital forces, thus had a more or less detailed doctrine of nature as an evolutionary process – a process driven by the forces of matter itself but, nevertheless, paradoxically, directed toward the formation of 'higher' forms of organisms. It was a similar, though more carefully articulated, sort of view of nature as progressive that Spencer developed around the same time in Britain, refusing, however, to have his system labeled as 'materialism'.<sup>83</sup> Darwin's theory, published in 1859 and quickly

<sup>79</sup> Jacob Moleschott, *Der Kreislauf des Lebens* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1852), 361–2, following Emil Du Bois-Reymond, *Untersuchungen über thierische Elektrizität* (1848), in *Vorträge über Philosophie und Gesellschaft*, ed. Siegfried Wollgast (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1974), 19–20.

<sup>80</sup> Moleschott, *Der Kreislauf des Lebens*, 258.

<sup>81</sup> Büchner, *Kraft und Stoff*, 367; Büchner, *Kraft und Stoff: Grundzüge der natürlichen Weltordnung*, 20th ed. (Leipzig: Thomas, 1902), 42.

<sup>82</sup> Moleschott, *Der Kreislauf des Lebens*, 83.

<sup>83</sup> Herbert Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause" [1857], in *Essays, Scientific, Political, and Speculative* (New York: Appleton, 1910), 1:8–62.

translated,<sup>84</sup> was generally welcomed by the scientific materialists as an ingenious supplement to the already established evolutionary doctrine, not, however, as a theory that would make the idea of progress in nature doubtful. In particular, the mechanism of natural selection was difficult to reconcile with progressive tendencies and was often criticized or, at least, deemphasized.<sup>85</sup>

When Moleschott had called “the eternal circulation of matter the soul of the world,”<sup>86</sup> the occurrence of nature-philosophic vocabulary (here and in many other places) was not coincidental. The transition from *Naturphilosophie* to a view of nature that incorporated basic materialist claims about the origin and development of living beings has been indicated previously in the case of Oken’s adaptation of Schellingian ideas. As much as such views were still committed to talking about *Geist* and *Natur*, they had become virtually indistinguishable from a materialist view of nature and could easily be understood as such. Unsurprisingly, complaints against Oken as having promoted midcentury scientific materialism were frequent.<sup>87</sup> Moleschott himself pointed out that the contrast between matter and mind, and thus between materialism and idealism, becomes largely irrelevant once one realizes that “force and spirit cannot be separated from matter,”<sup>88</sup> and David Friedrich Strauss, one of the heroes of the materialist movement, announced in a late work that in the end there really was no substantive difference between materialist and idealist conceptions of nature.<sup>89</sup>

Underlying these views, characteristic of much of the literature in the second half of the century, was the idea – which we have seen already in Schelling and his adaptation of Spinoza – that materialism and idealism were just two perspectives of one position, a double-aspect doctrine or monism that rejected all dualist approaches to nature. The ultimate substratum could be seen as either matter or spirit; in either case, the substratum would take on features of the other view.

One of the very few attempts to give a serious materialist account of mental phenomena was that of Heinrich Czolbe, who gave a sketch of the materialist position that was philosophically more detailed than the works mentioned so

<sup>84</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859).

<sup>85</sup> This was the general pattern of reception of Darwin’s theory: until late in the century, it was usually understood within the framework of pre-Darwinian ideas of progress (cf., e.g., Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1989], chap. 5; Gregory, *Scientific Materialism*, chap. 8).

<sup>86</sup> Moleschott, *Der Kreislauf des Lebens*, 41.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, *Der Erwerb aus einem vergangenen und die Erwartungen von einem zukünftigen Leben* (Erlangen: Palm & Enke, 1856), 3:657–60.

<sup>88</sup> Moleschott, *Der Kreislauf des Lebens*, 437; cf. also Lange, *Geschichte*, 2:132ff.

<sup>89</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1872), 207ff.



far.<sup>90</sup> Movement and communication of movement of ponderable and imponderable agencies in the nerves, for Czolbe, were the principles of sensation and perception. The role of consciousness is to unify perceptions, feelings, and so on: “Each of these experiences is a unity in which the starting point of a certain activity, which we call the I or the subject, coincides with the end point [of the activity] which we call the object.” Such unity could be understood in terms of moving matter only if the movements corresponding to an experience are circular, that is, if they return to their starting point. In such circular motion consists the quality of experiences that we call consciousness.<sup>91</sup> His theory, Czolbe pointed out, did not degrade our mental life by reducing it to material phenomena; rather, he attributed what was usually regarded as valuable in mental phenomena to all of nature.<sup>92</sup> This was why this materialism, in its author’s view, should properly be regarded as a worldview that is “thoroughly ideal,” as well as “completely realistic”; its inspiration Czolbe drew – perhaps not totally surprising anymore – from the writings of “Hölderlin, the friend of Schelling and Hegel.”<sup>93</sup> Under criticism, especially from Lotze, Czolbe later saw the need to abandon the proposed derivation of mental phenomena from matter. Without giving up the claim to have constructed a perfectly “naturalist” monistic system, he ultimately had to postulate the existence of three types of ontological ingredients in nature: material atoms, “purposive arrangements” of atoms (e.g., organisms), and a “world soul,” which consisted of spatially distributed sensations and emotions.<sup>94</sup>

### *Dialectical Materialism*

While the scientific materialists, with the notable exception of Czolbe, intended to develop their doctrine largely in separation from the philosophical context, dialectical materialism<sup>95</sup> began as the attempt to formulate a materialist view of the world that understands itself as an adaptation of basic materialist insights to the philosophical achievements of the idealist tradition. Dialectical materialism was a late development, presented only as critical commentaries on representatives of earlier materialism (1878, 1886) and in unpublished notes (1873–83) by Engels. Its beginnings lay in Marx’s reflections on Hegel and Feuerbach from the 1840s; its later development was left to Engels alone.

<sup>90</sup> On Czolbe see Lange, *Geschichte*, 141ff.; Gregory, *Scientific Materialism*, 122ff.

<sup>91</sup> Heinrich Czolbe, *Neue Darstellung des Sensualismus* (Leipzig: Hermann, 1855), 27.

<sup>92</sup> Czolbe, *Neue Darstellung*, 122–3.

<sup>93</sup> Czolbe, *Neue Darstellung*, 123, 203.

<sup>94</sup> Heinrich Czolbe, *Die Grenzen und der Ursprung der menschlichen Erkenntnis im Gegensatze zu Kant und Hegel* (Jena: Costenoble, 1865), vi, 200ff.

<sup>95</sup> The label is anachronistic; it is not used by either Marx or Engels.

It is easy to see, at least in outline, how the early Marx conceived of his materialism as an improvement on Feuerbach's views: Feuerbach, and with him the scientific ("vulgar") materialists, had treated nature only as the source of knowledge for the receiving human subject. But the idealist tradition, in however mystified form, had recognized the active nature of the subject itself. True materialism, or naturalism, therefore, will conceive of nature not only as the object of the passive subject but also as the target of human (economic, technical, scientific) activity. What we perceive as nature is, at least partly, the product of our own activity; furthermore, our very means of experience, the senses themselves, are not to be assumed to be fixed and passive; they themselves are, at least partly, products of our changing relations to nature and the character of society. This was materialism because it gave material nature independent existence, but it also accommodated the idealist view of the world-constituting activity of the subject.<sup>96</sup>

In Engels's later elaboration, the view was presented in sharp contrast to scientific materialism and in explicit recognition of *Naturphilosophie* as a precursor: "The *Naturphilosophen* relate to consciously dialectical science [i.e., dialectical materialism] as the [socialist] utopians relate to modern communism."<sup>97</sup> The relation here was presumably analogous to that between Hegel's dialectics and the Marxian version: the idealists had seen the correct structure but conceived it in a "mystified" form, as a development of spirit rather than of human practice. Thus Engels took it as an accepted result of "modern idealist philosophy" that there is an analogy of thought processes with natural and historical processes and that the same sorts of laws are valid for all of these processes.<sup>98</sup> This should furthermore be expected from a materialist perspective since thinking is a product of the human brain and humans are products of nature that develop in interaction with, and adaptation to, natural environments.<sup>99</sup> Schelling's immanent preestablished harmony between mind and nature could, therefore, be rescued into the materialist view and be used to motivate the search for dialectic laws in nature itself. And like Schelling, Engels felt encouragement in this search from the latest developments in science. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, or even until 1830, he claimed, scientists could get along with the traditional metaphysical categories and did not feel that

<sup>96</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1961–6) [henceforth Marx, MEW], 3:5; 40:539ff.; cf. Alfred Schmidt, *Der Begriff der Natur in der Lehre von Marx*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1971); Tom Rockmore, *Fichte, Marx, and the German Philosophical Tradition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).

<sup>97</sup> Marx, MEW 20:12n.

<sup>98</sup> Marx, MEW 20:529; 21:293.

<sup>99</sup> Marx, MEW 20:33.

the development of science itself, which in fact consisted only of mechanics, presented problems for those categories. That this had been a mistaken view began to reveal itself, according to Engels, when the first truly developmental theories of nature were formulated. With Kant's nebular hypothesis about the origin of the solar system, for example, the category of causality could be seen to become "fluid." The primordial nebula must have contained, Engels argued, matter in its "original state" where substances were not yet differentiated according to their characteristic effects, where they were "dissolved into pure matter as such." In this state, causes and effects cannot yet be distinguished because everything interacts with everything else. Reciprocal action, or interaction (*Wechselwirkung*), is, therefore, the fundamental concept, causation a derived notion – a claim that Engels also found illustrated in the transformability of forces such as motion, heat, magnetism, and electricity into each other. From this notion of interaction we arrive at the relation of causation as an abstraction: in order to understand individual phenomena, we have to consider them isolated from the universal connections they stand in; in this way, one phenomenon appears as cause, another as its effect.<sup>100</sup>

By the second half of the nineteenth century the insufficiency of static metaphysical categories in the philosophy of nature had become completely evident: The transformation of forces into each other and, in particular, the recent discoveries in cell theory and evolutionary theory showed, for Engels, that nature "moves in contradictions" that ultimately dissolve into each other or into "higher forms" and thus "demonstrate, so to speak, dialectics in nature."<sup>101</sup> Dialectics, therefore, was needed to grasp theoretically the immense amount of information produced by recent science; the traditional ways of classifying scientific knowledge, using fixed categories, just did not suffice anymore. Since dialectical thinking was the "analogon of, and therefore the method of explanation for, the developmental processes in nature, the connections of the whole, the transitions from one area of study to another," it had to be the adequate way of grasping the growing insights of current science into such processes.<sup>102</sup>

This is illustrated by the familiar Schellingian sequence of magnetism (polarity in one body), electricity (polarity in two bodies), and chemical processes (chemical attraction and repulsion). As new additions, further demonstrating the operation of polarity in nature, Engels mentioned cell formation (separation of the nucleus from cytoplasm) and evolution in Darwin's sense

<sup>100</sup> Marx, MEW 20:22–3, 509, 499; Allen Wood (*Karl Marx* [London: Routledge, 1981], 263n23) has pointed out the affinity of these claims to Schelling's treatment of causality.

<sup>101</sup> Marx, MEW 20:475.

<sup>102</sup> Marx, MEW 20:331.

(the “continued conflict of inheritance and adaptation”).<sup>103</sup> The stages in these sequences were related by a principle of *Steigerung*, or potentiation. Physiology, Engels said, echoing Schelling, is the chemistry of living bodies but, therefore, also ceases to be chemistry and “elevates itself to a higher potency.” Similarly, it is “the nature of matter to progress to the development of thinking beings, and this happens with necessity wherever the appropriate conditions . . . are in place.” The “law” that operated here was the switch from quantity to quality, namely, that an increase or decrease in quantitative features can give rise to a jump in qualitative features, as in phase transitions.<sup>104</sup> In the light of the endless potential for change hidden in matter, Engels could define its “mode of existence” as motion without being mistaken for a mechanist. As Marx had pointed out earlier, mechanism in, for instance, Hobbes’s version understood motion in an impoverished sense as merely mechanical or mathematical; the full sense, however, of which Bacon was still aware, is “urge, vital spirit, elastic force.”<sup>105</sup> What remained unclear, however, was how such dialectical materialist thinking and its results related to actual scientific practice. Engels sometimes classified his reflections on science *as* science, but it is doubtful whether scientific views on matter, for instance, would have lent justification to the claim that it is “the nature of matter” to lead to the development of conscious beings. Like Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, Engels’s materialist philosophy of nature was an attempt to understand science better than the scientists did.

### *Idealist Syntheses*

On the side of those opposed to materialism in all its variations, Hermann Lotze developed the perhaps most impressive philosophical view of nature, although his influence in Germany was minor compared to the effect his views had in England (Bradley, Broad, Russell) and America (Royce, James) later in the century.<sup>106</sup> Lotze’s reputation as a philosopher and physiologist was built in the 1840s through his attack on the notion of vital force, which he tried to eliminate on scientific as well as philosophical grounds. While this criticism initially seemed to locate him in the materialist camp, his actual motives were

<sup>103</sup> Marx, MEW 20:481.

<sup>104</sup> Marx, MEW 20:520, 479, 42.

<sup>105</sup> Marx, MEW 2:135–6.

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, John Theodore Merz’s evaluation of Lotze (*A History of European Thought in the 19th Century* [Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1912], 3:491ff., 575–6) and Reinhardt Pester’s documentation (*Hermann Lotze: Wege seines Denkens und Forschens* [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997]). Lotze’s friend, the physicist and psychologist Fechner, had developed a somewhat similar approach to the philosophy of nature. See Michael Heidelberger, *Die innere Seite der Natur* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1993).

very different. The main task of the philosophy of nature, for him, was to find a metaphysical interpretation of the results of the empirical sciences that would allow for the peaceful coexistence of scientific knowledge and the so-called higher view of things, as expressed in our emotional, aesthetic, and religious responses to nature. Philosophy had to demonstrate that the progress of science with its “overwhelming influence” on all aspects of culture was not, after all, a threat for the highest values in human culture. Though all science apparently tended toward mechanical approaches to nature and, therefore, seemed to lend itself to materialist interpretations, Lotze set out to show that the rule of mechanism was ultimately “harmless” and did not constitute an obstacle to a view of nature that satisfied our desire for secure knowledge as well as the craving for aesthetic and religious meaning.<sup>107</sup> The task was, as he once put it aptly, “to reproduce the materialist view without having to share its principles.”<sup>108</sup>

The metaphysical picture he designed was a spiritualist monism, a synthesis of the (apparent) mechanism and materialism of science with an idealist view required to secure the reality of values. Both, mechanism and idealism, he argued, could coexist at a superficial level if the observable world, as analyzed by science, could be read as a ‘text’ under aesthetic, moral, and religious requirements so that no conflicts between text and interpretation arise. Lotze emphasized the freedom to adopt such a consistent interpretation in terms of a spiritual reality underlying the apparent physical world; the mechanisms employed in nature, from this perspective, could then be seen as “abbreviations,” or ciphers, for the true relations among spiritual entities.<sup>109</sup> Why did this reading not conflict with the principle, which Lotze accepted, that science should explain everything mechanically? All mechanical explanation of events as caused by other events required laws covering the events as well as initial conditions, specifying the causing event. Mechanical explanation could never, said Lotze, explain why these rather than some other set of initial conditions obtained – at least not if we imagine the sequence of explanations extended indefinitely into the past of an event. Since the effect depends on the conditions as well as on the laws, arranging the conditions (perhaps at the beginning of the world) constituted, in principle, a way to allow control of the course of events from outside the mechanical causal nexus without interfering with the principles of scientific explanation. The spiritual reality Lotze

<sup>107</sup> Hermann Lotze, *Mikrokosmos: Ideen zur Naturgeschichte und Geschichte der Menschheit. Versuch einer Anthropologie*, 1856–64, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1876–80), 1:v, xv.

<sup>108</sup> Hermann Lotze, *Medizinische Psychologie* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1852), 163. Cf. the similar attitude of Huxley, “On the Physical Basis of Life” [1868], in *Method and Results: Essays* (New York: Appleton, 1917), 1:155ff.

<sup>109</sup> Hermann Lotze, *Allgemeine Physiologie des körperlichen Lebens* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1851), 636.

postulated as underlying the mechanism of nature is a world of ideas and purposes. But nothing in the physical world happens because some purpose should be reached; purposes are mechanically impotent. But with the help of special arrangements of initial conditions (and the existence of appropriate laws), every realized purpose could be understood as the “mechanically necessary result” of existing circumstances.<sup>110</sup> The mechanism in nature, then, was nothing but the physical means by which ideas or purposes are realized; the ideas created the mechanisms, that is, the laws and conditions, so as to achieve their realization. In this sense, Lotze thought the mechanisms pervading all of nature had been rendered “harmless” because they were subordinated to teleology.

Apart from the aesthetic-ethical motivation for a spiritualist metaphysics, Lotze gave two influential arguments for this view. He argued that only for conscious subjects can we account for identity over time, not, however, for inanimate things. This result he took to suggest that there are, strictly speaking, no inanimate things; all objects in nature have to be regarded as minds or souls (whose inner states, of course, are hidden from us). These souls, however, are not substances themselves; they are not Leibnizian monads; they are rather “moments,” or modifications, of one absolute soul, the one substance that is the real world.<sup>111</sup> Lotze concluded this monist view from a series of arguments that were supposed to demonstrate the unintelligibility of causal influence transmitted from one object to another. An object can influence another, he claimed, only insofar as both are connected within a substratum (‘the Absolute’) of which they are attributes.<sup>112</sup>

The attempt to design a metaphysics of nature that avoided all conflict with the sciences and that claimed to be the ‘best explanation’ (or the “necessary closure,” in Fechner’s phrase) of what the sciences teach about the world thus ended in a sort of panpsychism that allowed, one, perhaps for the last time in a philosophically sophisticated manner, to see the apparently mechanistic world of nineteenth-century science as a whole to be alive. Lotze’s system did not withstand the soon-dominant neo-Kantian perspective in German academic philosophy, which rejected metaphysical views of nature in favor of a renewed critical philosophy, or *Erkenntnistheorie*. Outside these boundaries, however, Ernst Haeckel’s naturalist monism, complete with “atomic souls,” chemical atoms with sensation and will, flourished with great popular success.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Lotze, *Allgemeine Physiologie*, 57ff.; Lotze, *Mikrokosmos*, 449–50.

<sup>111</sup> For example, Hermann Lotze, *Metaphysik (System der Philosophie II)* (1879) (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1912), 164.

<sup>112</sup> Lotze, *Allgemeine Physiologie*, 122–3; Lotze, *Metaphysik*, 492ff.

<sup>113</sup> Ernst Haeckel, *Die Perigenese der Plastidule oder die Wellenerzeugung der Lebensteilchen* (Berlin: Reimer, 1876), 38.

## CONCLUSION

Around 1840 Emil du Bois-Reymond, soon to become the most outspoken reductionist in nineteenth-century German science, planned to write a book, "The Objective Analog to the Philosophy of Subjective Speculation," a work to be fashioned after Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, "but quite sober, clear, and concise." About eighty years later, Alfred North Whitehead, searching for a philosophy of nature that would not merely reproduce what he perceived to be the biases of the sciences, still sought "a transformation of some main doctrines of Absolute Idealism onto a realistic basis."<sup>114</sup> For many attempts at a philosophy of nature during these eighty years, the title of Du Bois's project could have served as a fitting, though often unacknowledged, motto.

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<sup>114</sup> Du Bois quoted in David H. Galaty, "The Philosophical Basis of Mid-Nineteenth Century German Reductionism," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 29 (1974): 309; Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), viii (the idealism referred to is Bradley's).

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## NATURAL SCIENCES

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The nineteenth century saw the flourishing of various natural sciences, such as we know them now: statistical mechanics, geology, evolutionary biology, cell theory, and so on. Many of what Kuhn used to call “paradigms” were invented in this period.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, ontological commitments, methods, canonical sets of examples were devised in various sciences that were discussed throughout the century and longer, up until today (corpuscular ontology in mechanics, statistical analyses of gas, population thinking, and animal experimentation). Unsurprisingly, philosophers took into account such changes, and the general status of the natural sciences deeply changed in philosophical discourse. The present article aims at identifying the reasons for such changes, which are attested by several gross facts: (A) In this period, a methodology for the natural sciences was developed by philosophers and scientists alike and gave rise to work still considered by philosophers of science, such as Bernard (1865) on experimental reasoning, Whewell (1840) on consilience and inductive sciences, or Mill’s empiricist views on induction (1843).<sup>2</sup> There was also an important effort to classify the sciences (Comte, Spencer) and demarcate human sciences from natural sciences (Dilthey, Schleiermacher) – a concern that would be crucial for later logical positivists. (B) On the other hand, during the century taken as a whole, there was a sharp contrast between such philosophical assessments of the natural sciences and their methods, and a flourishing theoretical framework elaborated in the beginning of the century, mostly in Germany, called *Naturphilosophie* – a program that has since been seen as one of the most speculative, hence unscientific, considerations of nature to be developed. (C)

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l’étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: Baillière, 1865); William Whewell, *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (London: Parker, 1840); John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (1843), in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963–91).

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It is striking, if we compare theoretical works after 1800 to some previous texts, that it becomes far easier to distinguish “philosophers” from “scientists.”<sup>3</sup> Most of the important contributors to the nineteenth-century natural sciences were not philosophers (Darwin, Maxwell, Lagrange, Faraday, Mendel, Lyell, etc.), by contrast with scientists of the previous centuries (Descartes, Leibniz, Pascal, Diderot, d’Alembert, Maupertuis, etc.). In works considered to be “philosophy” in the classical period or Enlightenment, one may find sections about applied physics (the fourth book of Descartes’s *Principia philosophia*, for example, includes considerations about where to find fountains), whereas in the nineteenth century, such investigations, even by the same authors (like Hegel on the orbits of planets, or Schelling on medicine) are not among the content of philosophical treatises as such.

This latter fact indicates something deeper about what science and philosophy were becoming: It became more and more possible to undertake a scientific discourse without taking sides on philosophical issues, such as metaphysical or epistemological problems. One could see such changes in a Kuhnian way: several disciplines – mechanics, physics, biology, physiology – found their paradigms in this period. Focused empirical investigation, cumulating discoveries, and solving riddles were substituted with mostly conceptual arguments about ontologies, causal powers, and so on. Yet such a view does not seem sufficient because the changes at stake there also affected the meaning of what philosophy is. This article will argue that the increasing independence of various fields of natural sciences in the nineteenth century was part of a large rearrangement of knowledge at this period, through which both philosophers and scientists elaborated new regimes of discourse and new possibilities of truth. The characteristics that distinguish nineteenth-century relations between philosophy and natural sciences result from such rearrangements.

From this perspective, it is no accident that Whewell forged the word “scientist” in 1833. It is a sign that knowledge about nature had changed its status radically. Formerly, such knowledge was subdivided among three “natural” discourses: natural theology, natural history, and natural philosophy. “Nature,” so understood, meant nature considered without supernatural (i.e., revealed) cognitive abilities. Yet, our spontaneous cognitive ability was thought of as a *lumen naturale*, whose source was the divine understanding, and whose existence allowed Malebranche or Leibniz to prove the existence of God. During this century, the main discourse of nature became the “natural sciences.” This means both that production of knowledge about nature took new forms (the relationship between describing and explaining, the status of

<sup>3</sup> Gérard Lebrun, *Kant et la fin de la métaphysique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970).

basic concepts such as force, space, etc.), so that philosophy might become external to science, and that the range of possible philosophical positions about scientific knowledge was widely transformed.

I will argue that two intertwined processes account for the philosophical status of the natural sciences in the nineteenth century: first, the development of the autonomy of the sciences of nature – mechanics, astronomy, physiology, geology, and so forth – in the sense that they could be pursued with no appeal to theological or metaphysical considerations; second, changes in the status of metaphysics and nature itself within the philosophical discourse, beginning with Kant's criticism. I will analyze major moments of those trends and throughout the chapter, will insist on two correlated dimensions: the positions taken by philosophy regarding natural sciences, and the important breakthroughs in the natural sciences that required being taken into account by philosophers. One of the main intellectual events in this context was the constitution of biology as an autonomous science; therefore, the present chapter will focus especially on biology. It is rather a methodological choice and of course does not mean that other events in nineteenth-century natural sciences were of less importance. However, this biased perspective is not only justified by the speciality of the author, but also by a concern to complement other chapters in this volume focusing mostly on physics (e.g., "Conceptions of the Natural World, 1790–1870" by Alexander Rueger).

Of course, it must be specified that the constitution of natural sciences by their "scientists" is not a purely intellectual event. It uncovers social processes, through which "natural philosophers" have been replaced by professional scientists; specific networks, modes of legitimacy, and transmission; and journals. The autonomy of the sciences also means that being a physicist or a biologist became a socially defined position, often implying a salary and teaching duties, which implies a specialization of research activity. Social studies of science have investigated the rise of disciplines in the nineteenth century as involving a process of "professionalization."<sup>4</sup> It makes no sense to reduce the philosophical changes in the very notion and structure of knowledge to such social processes, or inversely to reduce those social processes to their mere manifestation; they surely reinforced one another, and the result was the ongoing constitution of

<sup>4</sup> For example, Toby Gelfand, *Professionalizing Modern Medicine: Paris Surgeons and Medical Science and Institutions in the 18th Century* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 58–75; Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 18–28, 317–21; Lynn Nyhart, *Biology Takes Form: Animal Morphology and the German Universities, 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); David Cahan, ed., *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences: Writing the History of Nineteenth Century Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

the natural sciences in the nineteenth century, achieving paradigms of novel disciplines practiced by what had become professional scientists.

The first section of the article reviews some important advances of the natural sciences that raise essential philosophical issues and some ways philosophers addressed them in turn. The second section determines systematic positions of philosophy in the face of natural sciences that emerged and were realized through the century.

## DECISIVE TRENDS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NATURAL SCIENCES AND THEIR CHALLENGES TO PHILOSOPHY

### *Regions of Nature: Organic and Inorganic Domains*

Many authors emphasized,<sup>5</sup> as did Foucault,<sup>6</sup> that biology did not exist as such before the nineteenth century, since it was only at this moment that a science of living functioning and processes as such became a legitimate program. For instance, in Lamarck's or Bichat's work, nature is divided into two ontological domains, living and nonliving phenomena, whereas classical natural history knew only a gradual continuum from mineral to plants, and from those to animals, with fuzzy boundaries (corals, sponges, fungi, etc.). However, such a project had been diversely elaborated along various axes in the eighteenth century, for instance in descriptive embryology,<sup>7</sup> in the physiology of Haller and the vitalists, in the progressive definition of comparative anatomy (Buffon, Daubenton, Vicq d'Azyr, Goethe). As a result of the convergence of those two trends, there emerged a biological science,<sup>8</sup> which was identified by the coining of the word "biology" around 1800 by Lamarck, Burdach, and Treviranus simultaneously.<sup>9</sup> Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* was a milestone for the philosophical consideration of natural sciences in the following century, because of its attempt to build an analytics of biological judgment. Actually, by highlighting the epistemological specificity of the life sciences, Kant philosophically assessed something that happened progressively in the eighteenth

<sup>5</sup> Giulio Barsanti, "La naissance de la biologie: Observations, théories, métaphysiques en France, 1740–1810." In *Nature, Histoire, Société: Mélanges offerts à J. Roger*, eds. R. Rey, C. Blanckaert, and J. L. Fischer (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995), 196–228; François Jacob, *La logique du vivant: Une histoire de l'hérédité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970); William Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century: Problems of Form, Function and Transformation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 2–11.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Caspar Friedrich Wolff, *Theorie von der Generation: In zwei Abhandlungen erklärt und bewiesen. Theoria generationis* (1759; Berlin: Friedrich Wilhelm Birnstiel; Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> Barsanti, "La naissance de la biologie."

<sup>9</sup> Peter McLaughlin, "Naming Biology," *Journal of the History of Biology* 35, no. 1 (2002): 1–4.

century, namely, the constitution of an autonomous kind of knowledge about living phenomena or entities.<sup>10</sup>

The emergence of biology was crucial for the structure of the natural sciences because it introduced a sort of ontological stratification in nature: living and nonliving entities are two separate kinds of things, but living entities are somehow constituted by physical elements (molecules, etc.), so that life appears as a new and specific level of being on the basis of physical nature. In the nineteenth century, biology was instituted as a discipline and stood on the side of what now is called the “natural sciences.” Instead of a natural philosophy – meant by the Latin phrase *philosophia naturalis*, which was used by many authors – flanked by a “natural history” that describes and classifies entities of the three realms, the “natural sciences” appeared: the plural indicates the heterogeneity in nature. Whereas classical philosophers (such as Leibniz) thought that natural philosophy as such would allow a general methodological approach (at least in principle) of all its branches as “*mathesis universalis*,” with a common mathematical-logical framework, instead Kant argued that biology required a specific use of reflective judgment (namely, teleology). With Kant’s idea that another principle of intelligibility is required to grasp organisms, the concern first arises that the form of natural sciences might not always involve discovering laws (which for Kant are, as universal laws, yielded by transcendental principles of possible experience).<sup>11</sup> Kant criticized the classical notion of *order* (held, for example, by Leibniz), grounded in the will of God in the same way as laws of nature were founded, and showed that one could not equate *nature* (structured by its universal laws) with an *order of nature* (which requires a unity of empirical laws not warranted by the transcendental possibility of experience).<sup>12</sup>

There is no continuity between natural sciences and the apprehension of a divine root of order in nature, so, unlike traditional natural philosophy, the

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Huneman, “Reflexive Judgment and Embryology: Kant’s Shift Between the First and the Third Critique,” in *Understanding Purpose: Kant and the Philosophy of Biology*, North American Kant Society Publication Series, ed. Phillip Huneman (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 75–100; Huneman, *Métaphysique et biologie: Kant et la constitution du concept d’organisme* (Paris: Kimé, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> See Michael Friedman, “Causal Laws and the Foundations of Natural Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 161–199, for a more detailed analysis of this relation. Nature for Kant is in a sense exhausted by its lawlikeness. As he says in the *Prolegomena*, “Nature is the existence [*Dasein*] of things, to the extent that it is determined according to laws” (§14).

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Introduction; Philip Kitcher, “Projecting the Order of Nature,” in *Kant’s Philosophy of Physical Science*, ed. R. E. Butts (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986), 201–35.

natural sciences cannot lead directly to natural theology.<sup>13</sup> To this extent, the philosophical assessment of the emerging plurality of natural sciences goes with Kant's critique of natural theology as a consequence of natural philosophy. In this sense, Kant's transcendental reform of metaphysical concepts, such as order and law in the first and third *Critiques*, paved the way for the philosophical understanding of a new structure of knowledge emerging at this time. This structure broke with the continuous configuration that tied together natural philosophy, natural history, and natural theology (though of course Kant himself continued to speak of a metaphysics of nature, *Metaphysik der Natur*, e.g., in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, 1786).

Granted, Kant's critical system clearly intended to address major failures of traditional metaphysics, best represented by Leibniz's system. Yet such analysis, through the third *Critique*, had an important impact upon natural sciences in Germany, since naturalists like Blumenbach and Girtanner and zoologists like Kielmayer<sup>14</sup> elaborated Kant's definition of teleological and mechanistic justifications for their research programs in embryology and morphology. This led to a putative "Kantian tradition in biology" (following Lenoir),<sup>15</sup> which in the first decade of the nineteenth century was crucial for the autonomy of life sciences<sup>16</sup> – a process attesting to the inseparability of a metaphysical reflection on nature and order and a philosophical understanding of the emerging scientific knowledge of nature.

More precisely, all during the nineteenth century, biology consolidated its own structure, with its disciplines acquiring proper research programs. After the various uses of animal experiments, such as Spallanzani on digestion<sup>17</sup> on irritability and the sensibility of the parts of organisms,<sup>18</sup> experimental physiology established a specific *experimental* approach of the functioning of organisms as wholes: from Bichat's *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* to Magendie's

<sup>13</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §82.

<sup>14</sup> John Zammito, "Kant's Ambivalence Towards Epigenesis," in Huneman, *Understanding Purpose*, 51–74; Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life: Teleology and Mechanism in Nineteenth-Century German Biology* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> See Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, 229–37; Phillip Sloan, in Richard Owen, *The Hunterian Lectures in Comparative Anatomy, May and June 1837*, ed. P. Sloan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; London: British Museum of Natural History, 1992); Nicholas Jardine speaks of a "Blumenbach–Kant program" (*Scenes of Inquiry: On the Reality of Questions in the Sciences* [New York: Clarendon Press, 1991], 28–42; Huneman, *Understanding Purpose*).

<sup>17</sup> Alessandro Dini, *Vita e organismo: Le origini della fisiologia sperimentale in Italia* (Florence: Olschki, 1996), or Albrecht von Haller, *Dissertation sur les parties sensibles et irritables des animaux*, trans. Samuel Tissot (Lausanne: Marc-Michel Bousquet, 1755).

<sup>18</sup> Maria-Teresa Monti, *Congettura ed esperienza nella fisiologia di Haller: La riforma dell' "anatomia animata" e il sistema della generazione* (Florence: Olschki, 1990).

*Leçons de physiologie expérimentale*<sup>19</sup> and Claude Bernard's famous study of the glycogen-secreting function of the liver, and of the nervous system through uses of toxins.<sup>20</sup> The focus was put more and more on the nervous system as a circuit required in the global functioning of higher organisms. Since work by Lavoisier on the chemistry of respiration in the previous century, *regulation* became one of the major features of organisms<sup>21</sup> – for example, how they maintain constant temperatures and other parameters in the face of changing environments, and so on. The nervous system was clearly one important means of regulation and naturally became the focus of numerous researches in physiology, especially in research by Charles Bell and Magendie about the function of various parts of the system.

*Comparative anatomy* emerged as the scientific investigation of similarities and differences of form and function across the animal domain. Cuvier elaborated it systematically,<sup>22</sup> after works by Goethe, Peter Camper, Vicq d'Azyr, Daubenton, and others.<sup>23</sup> According to the principle of conditions of existence, formulated by Cuvier, everything in an animal has to be compatible with its continued existence in its milieu. And according to the principle of connections, developed by Étienne Geoffroy Saint Hilaire,<sup>24</sup> topological identities of parts of organs could be found between various organisms that underlie the difference of organs. Through these principles, a general reconstruction of types of organisms could be pursued. A line of reasoning called “transcendental morphology,” represented by Johannes Friedrich Meckel, Étienne Serres, Joseph Henri Green, Richard Owen, and others, aims at recreating the various essential types that were realized by extant species and that were likely to be ordered in a sort of logical process.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> James E. Lesch, *Science and Medicine in France: The Emergence of Experimental Physiology, 1790–1855* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); William R. Albury, “Experiment and Explanation in the Physiology of Bichat and Magendie,” *Studies in the History of Biology* 1 (1977): 47–131; Philippe Huneman, *Bichat: La vie et la mort* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Mirko Grmek, *Raisonnement expérimental et recherches toxicologiques chez Claude Bernard* (Paris: Droz, 1973), 265–329; Lawrence Holmes, *Claude Bernard and Animal Chemistry: The Emergence of a Scientist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> Georges Canguilhem, *La connaissance de la vie* (Paris: Vrin, 1965).

<sup>22</sup> Georges Cuvier, *Le règne animal distribué d'après son organisation* (1802) (Paris: Deterville, 1817).

<sup>23</sup> William Coleman, *George Cuvier, Zoologist: A Study in the History of Evolution Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 45–66; for a more externalist analysis, Dorinda Outram, “Uncertain Legislator: George Cuvier, Laws of Nature and Their Intellectual Content,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 19 (1986): 323–68.

<sup>24</sup> *Philosophie anatomique*. 2 vols (Paris: Baillière, 1828–32).

<sup>25</sup> Phillip Rehbock, *The Philosophical Naturalists: Themes in Early Nineteenth-Century British Biology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Bernard Balan, *L'ordre et le temps* (Paris: Vrin, 1979); Phillip Sloan, “Kant and British Bioscience,” in Huneman, *Understanding Purpose*, 149–70.



On the other hand, the understanding of the *development* of organisms after Wolffian descriptive embryology, which had superseded earlier controversies about preformation and epigenetism, became more and more fine-grained, delivering insights into the stages before organogenesis, where tissues are formed (Pander's theory of germs layers),<sup>26</sup> and finally culminated with Von Baer's major treatise *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Thiere*,<sup>27</sup> which Darwin praised as the most important achievement in biology in the century.

If nature itself was divided between living and nonliving things, as treated by two distinct sciences, the intrinsic hierarchy of nature was appearing within each of these fields. From the French vitalists, who held that organisms were composed of small parts that had their own "life" as sensibility,<sup>28</sup> the life sciences cultivated the intuition that living entities can be articulated into distinct levels. In 1800, Bichat's *Anatomie générale* suggested that the usual distinction between organisms and organs had to be replaced by a ladder: organisms, systems of organs (such as digestive systems, etc.), organs, and tissues – the latter being the elementary level of life. By doing so, he was explicitly referring to what Lavoisier did earlier in chemistry by decomposing the so-called elements into simple bodies, which later were to be identified as atoms. Hence, life would repeat the multilayered structure of matter in general, and each layer was to be conceived of as an "arrangement" of distinct entities of the previous layer. Such a quest of "elementary" levels in biology came down to the cell theory, elaborated eventually by Schwann, Schleiden (botany) in the 1830s, and then Virchow.<sup>29</sup> Cells marked an ontological limit for biology: all biological realities are composed of cells, and cells have no acellular precursors – *omne cellula e cellula*, as Virchow's slogan says (originally coined by Raspail). As such, cell theory became a unifying framework for biological research: pathology, embryology, and physiology had to be understood in the last instance at the level of cells. When Bernard adopted cell theory, he claimed that everything in organisms is for the continued life of the cells.<sup>30</sup> According to Comte,<sup>31</sup> Cuvier's method of comparing morphologies and Bichat's theory of elementary tissues

<sup>26</sup> Charles H. Pander, *Beiträge zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Hühchens im Eye* (Wurtzburg: Brönnner, 1817).

<sup>27</sup> Karl Ernst von Baer, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Thiere: Beobachtungen und Reflexionen* (Königsberg: Bornträger, 1828).

<sup>28</sup> Theophile Bordeu, *Recherches anatomiques sur la position des glandes et leur action* (Paris: Quillau père, 1751).

<sup>29</sup> François Duchesneau, *Genèse de la théorie cellulaire* (Paris: Vrin, 1987), chap. 4; Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century*, 16–35.

<sup>30</sup> Claude Bernard, *Leçons sur les phénomènes de la vie communs aux animaux et aux végétaux* (Paris: Baillière, 1878).

<sup>31</sup> Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive: I. Philosophie première* (1830) (Paris: Hermann, 1978), 40th lecture.

were two main principles of biology: indeed, they were two ways to apprehend biological diversity, by unraveling the common ground on which all organisms are composed, and by figuring out the major ways to combine such elements in kinds of organisms.

More generally, the second part of the century saw the rise of theories that became comprehensive frameworks for the disciplines sketched here: besides cell theory, Bernard elaborated a theory of the “internal milieu” that was intended as a framework for various researches on regulations. Organisms seem indeed not directly affected by determinations in the external environments because they created within themselves a milieu, composed of liquids, blood, lymph, and so on, which mediates affections of external environments. Physiology of the nervous system, as well as endocrinology (the science of internal secretions) that was coming into existence (Brown-Sequard, etc.), could be encompassed within a theory of the “milieu intérieur.” But of course the most pervasive and influential theory for biology has been Darwinian evolutionary theory: the *Origin of Species*, as he himself said, was “one long argument,” drawing on morphology, biogeography, embryology, animal psychology, paleontology, in order to argue for a common descent by natural selection (at least) for all species. But reciprocally, such a hypothesis was intended to make sense of the facts in those various disciplines. (Darwinism is considered in the next section more extensively.)

The philosophical issue raised by this institutionalization of biology into disciplines was of course the specificity of life, as such, and of its scientific knowledge. Various ontological claims accompanied the formation of biological disciplines – vitalism, materialism, dualism, reductionism, emergentism – among which one could see prototypes of current positions to be found in philosophy of science. “Where” and “What is life?” were the metaphysical questions to be answered in this new framework, especially since theoreticians worried about the level where life itself appeared in organisms that were composed of basic organic elements: is life a property of the tissues or the cells, or does it arise when those are brought together? Some thought that what is specific to life belongs to the arrangement of parts, but that living matter itself has no special properties. The physiologist Magendie,<sup>32</sup> after Diderot in the previous century and like some German biochemists later,<sup>33</sup> supported such an option, while the synthesis of urea by Wöhler in 1829 reduced the prospects of finding an essential difference between organic and inorganic matter.

<sup>32</sup> François Magendie, *Leçons sur les phénomènes chimiques et vivants* (Paris: Baillière, 1842).

<sup>33</sup> Oswei Temkin, “Materialism in French and German Physiology of the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 20 (1946): 322–30.

On the other hand, vitalism did not disappear, since in the field of physiology or in embryology prominent scientists like Virchow or Driesch<sup>34</sup> found arguments to argue for a transcendent principle of life that would underlie organisms. In his *Philosophie zoologique*,<sup>35</sup> Lamarck held a protoemergentist position,<sup>36</sup> arguing that living matter had nothing special, no inherent proper force, but that the organization of matter in *corps organisés* gives rise to specific laws. In a famous controversy,<sup>37</sup> both the physician Lawrence and the surgeon Abernethy could refer to the same John Hunter – himself ambiguous on the subject<sup>38</sup> – to defend, respectively, materialism or vitalism. However, as Figlio has shown,<sup>39</sup> this controversy implicitly opposed not only theories, but also assumptions about what science has to be, as well as ideological and political positions. Yet the indifference of important authors – not only Hunter, but also Cuvier and Geoffroy – on those metaphysical issues suggests that such a metaphysics of life did not impinge on the production of actual life sciences. However, with the rise of cell theory the question lurked again, in the form of an alternative between protoplasm (of which cells were supposed to be made) and cells themselves, as the proper subjects to which life should be ascribed. (Bernard argued for protoplasm, whereas authors of the *Dictionnaire de médecine* [1774], Littré and Robin, argued for the cell.)<sup>40</sup> Kant himself noticed that metaphysical options about life do not make much sense since they assume that the principles of our knowledge for organisms have the same kind of ontological validity as principles of physics – which they have not.<sup>41</sup> The only question left is to single out the epistemological specificity, about which

<sup>34</sup> Rudolf Virchow, "On the Mechanistic Interpretation of Life" (1858), in *Disease, Life and Man: Selected Essays by Rudolf Virchow*, trans. and ed. L. J. Rather, 102–19 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958); Hans Driesch, *Analytische Theorie der organischen Entwicklung* (Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1894).

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, *Philosophie zoologique* (1809) (Paris: Flammarion, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Bernard Baertschi, *Les rapports de l'âme et du corps: Descartes, Diderot et Maine de Biran* (Paris: Vrin, 1992), chap. 5; Giulio Barsanti, "Lamarck and the Birth of Biology: 1740–1810," in *Romanticism in Science: Science in Europe, 1790–1840*, eds. S. Poggi and M. Bossi (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 47–74.

<sup>37</sup> Leon S. Jacyna, "Immanence or Transcendence: Theories of Life and Organization in Britain, 1790–1835," *Isis* 74 (1983): 311–29.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Cross, "John Hunter, Animal Physiology and Late 18th Century Physiological Discourse," *Studies in History of Biology* 5 (1981): 1–110.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Figlio, "The Metaphor of Organization: An Historiographical Perspective on the Bio-medical Sciences of the Early Nineteenth Century," *History of Science* 14 (1974): 17–53.

<sup>40</sup> Emile Littré and Charles Robin, eds., *Dictionnaire de médecine* (Paris: Baillière, 1873).

<sup>41</sup> In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §72, Kant showed that all metaphysical positions – animism, hylozoism (living matter is animated), materialism – are meaningless for the reason mentioned. Whereas this argument had no decisive philosophical or scientific influence, it helps to argue that such metaphysical controversies do not really affect science itself, and that no scientific achievement in biology necessarily commits one to one such option.

the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* made a crucial contribution, in distinguishing two main principles of explanation: above all, mechanisms, which explain behaviors of the whole on the basis of the causal activities of their parts; and teleology, which assumes the wholes in order to explain the parts.<sup>42</sup> Teleological employment of the “reflective faculty of judgment” is regulative for knowledge, where “regulative” means for Kant that teleology gets its sole meaning in relation to our project of understanding organisms whereas constitutive principles are required in any kind of knowledge and, before that, in experience as such. Scientists like Von Baer or Pander (or previously Blumenbach),<sup>43</sup> while recognizing Kant’s distinction and the role of teleology, progressively conflated the status of both principles. They may simply have had no interest in Kant’s main concern in stating those distinctions: it was mostly metaphysical,<sup>44</sup> since Kant tried to understand the meaning of order and purposiveness in the structure of knowledge established by transcendental philosophy. Interestingly, Kant’s distinction rested upon the status of laws: mechanisms instantiate the principle of causality, which underlies the most universal laws of nature, whereas teleology is merely a requisite stemming from our experience of entities, such as organisms, for which laws of nature do not find any necessity regarding their internal organization. Trivially, the same chemical laws are in play in living and dead bodies. But for chemistry it is contingent that bodies are dead or alive so this difference should rest on another principle than those underlying chemical intelligibility. The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* does not deny that laws hold for organisms but argues that they are not enough to account for the specificity of organisms.<sup>45</sup> To this extent, the plurality of explanations involved in life sciences can be refined if we consider what exactly is achieved by teleology. Clearly, *functions* in physiology are pointed out by teleological reasoning, and the *adaptations* through which organisms fit their environment are also the subject of such thinking. However, descriptive embryology and comparative anatomy do conceive of

<sup>42</sup> Peter McLaughlin, *Kant’s Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation, Antinomy and Teleology* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Meller Press, 1990).

<sup>43</sup> James Larson, “Vital Forces: Regulative Principles or Constitutive Agents? A Strategy in German Physiology, 1786–1802,” *Isis* 70 (1979): 235–49; Robert Richards, “Kant and Blumenbach on the *Bildungstrieb*: A Historical Misunderstanding,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biology and Biomedical Sciences* 31, no. 1 (2000): 11–32.

<sup>44</sup> Zammito, “Kant’s Ambivalence.”

<sup>45</sup> Kant calls the proper realm of the faculty of reflective judgment “the lawfulness of the contingent as such” (*Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische [later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische] Akademie der Wissenschaften. 29 vols. [Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–] [hereafter Kant, Ak], 20:217), which entails that its objects – the clusters of empirical laws and organisms – follow another kind of necessity than the essential lawlikeness of nature.

types, assumed as norms by the embryological description of development (as we need a criterion in order to distinguish correct and incorrect ontogenesis), and as reconstructed schemes of relations between parts that comparative anatomists can build in order to compare various individuals from diverse varieties and species. Such distinctions within teleology<sup>46</sup> could be traced back to the general contrast documented by E. S. Russell's famous book *Form and Function* (1916),<sup>47</sup> which identified two opposite trends in life sciences: the biology of form and the biology of function. Famously, in 1830, a debate in Paris opposed two prominent proponents of such traditions: Cuvier for the functional biology and Geoffroy for the biology of form. In a word, Cuvier held that the first principle of comparative anatomy was the adaptation of species to their environment – hence the functional cohesion of organisms that yielded their viability and adaptedness – whereas for Geoffroy, all species of a family were built on the same organizational plan, and adaptations were merely a fine tuning of this plan. Interestingly, this was for Goethe the main event in the period, as he told Eckermann. The poet himself wrote a *Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790),<sup>48</sup> and then treatises on comparative morphology – in which he is credited with the discovery of the intermaxillar bone of man, which established an anatomical unity between quadrupeds and humans. Those works embody a mostly formal understanding of the processes at stake: Goethe shows that the possible transformation of one element, the leaf, can successively give rise to all stages of the life cycle of a plant (pistil, flowers, seed, etc.), and that each plant can be generated from one basic life cycle by altering some moments of the process.<sup>49</sup> The same reasoning is somehow applied to morphology; here, the causal-mechanical aspects of the processes are not taken into account.<sup>50</sup> There is an intelligibility of forms that allows one to understand why plants are the way they are and develop the way they do, without getting into the chemical details involved in such processes. Later, when Owen<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Philippe Huneman, "From Comparative Anatomy to the 'Adventures of Reason,'" *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2006): 649–74.

<sup>47</sup> Edmund S. Russell, *Form and Function: A Contribution to the History of Animal Morphology* (London: John Murray, 1916).

<sup>48</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Toward a General Comparative Theory." In *Collected Works of Goethe*, vol. 12, *Scientific Works* (1790), trans. Douglas Miller (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 54–5.

<sup>49</sup> Ron Brady, "Form and Cause in Goethe's Morphology," in *Goethe and the Sciences: A Reappraisal*, eds. F. Amrine, H. Wheeler, and F. J. Zucker (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1987).

<sup>50</sup> See Stéphane Schmitt, "Type et métamorphose dans la morphologie de Goethe, entre Classicisme et Romantisme," *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences* 54 (2001): 495–522, and Timothy Lenoir, "The Eternal Laws of Form: Morphotypes and the Conditions of Existence in Goethe's Biological Thought," in *Goethe and the Sciences: A Reappraisal*, eds. F. Amrine, F. J. Zucker, and H. Wheeler (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1987), 17–28, for Goethe's methodology in analyzing forms.

<sup>51</sup> See e.g. Owen, *The Hunterian Lectures*.

is able to reconstruct the vertebrate archetype from the knowledge of types of many kinds of vertebrates, a form underlying the law concerning the embryogenesis of individuals of those species, the same sort of formal explanations will be at stake.<sup>52</sup> In general, the school of transcendental morphology (deeply influenced by Geoffroy Saint Hilaire and Von Baer) made use of such a formal understanding of living forms and phenomena.

### *Historicity of Nature*

The most influential theory was Darwin's view of life, which ascribed to history a crucial role in the science of nature, since many features of organic life have to be understood in a historical perspective. However, throughout the nineteenth century, a growing concern for the historicity of nature was distinctive of work in the natural sciences. Of course, the various brands of transformisms are signs of such a trend, from the first speculative attempts in the eighteenth century to Darwin and Wallace, through Lamarck<sup>53</sup> or Geoffroy Saint Hilaire's philosophy of nature.<sup>54</sup> However, the historical concern within science was much more pervasive than those speculations and may concern the whole of nature.

First, as Lovejoy has shown,<sup>55</sup> the very ancient motive of the "great chain of being," according to which all creatures could be continuously ordered from the simplest to the most complex, underwent a temporalizing (i.e., a translation of order of perfection into succession of time) after the Enlightenment. Whereas for Leibniz it meant that nature does not make any "jumps," for transformist thinkers like Erasmus Darwin, Robinet, de Maillet, or Lamarck, it meant that this complexification is a temporal process that occurred on Earth. On the other hand, Herder in the *Ideen*,<sup>56</sup> thought that living forms were such that the simpler would provide the conditions of the most complex. In this sense, some living forms such as vertebrates, even if their type were somehow preconceived and necessary, would not come into being before the other most simple forms, such as invertebrates, in which their conditions were already present. This implies that the "philosophy of history of mankind," Herder's proper object, presupposes a history of nature. Of course, this is a *necessary*

<sup>52</sup> Nicholas Rupke, "Richard Owen's Vertebrate Archetype," *Isis* 84 (1993): 231–51.

<sup>53</sup> Pietro Corsi, *The Age of Lamarck: Evolutionary Theories in France, 1790–1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> Toby Appel, *The Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate: French Biology in the Decades Before Darwin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 69–108, 205–15.

<sup>55</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936).

<sup>56</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784), *Sämtliche Werke* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1967), vol. 14, bk. IX.

history since it obeys a preordered plan and therefore does not match what we mean by “history.”

Transcendental morphologists, seeking the general types of animals and the possible formal transformations that make it possible to go from one to another, always conceived of a kind of process according to which those essential forms proceed into being. Since the forms themselves unfold in a logically preordered sequence, this is not what we mean by evolution. However, such processes were thought of as temporally realized by most of the transcendental morphologists. This is the case of Von Baer’s essential types, and this is generally believed by most transcendental morphologists for whom the Herderian relations of conditioned and conditioning form would determine a historical process of generating animal types. One major argument here was the similarity between the scale of types and the ontogenetic process. This was noticed by Meckel and Serres and later reinterpreted as “recapitulation law” by Haeckel in a Darwinian framework. Von Baer had already pointed out that what is repeated in an embryogenesis is not the adult forms of previous species, but only their embryos.<sup>57</sup> First, this means it is very difficult to check to what extent those scientists were evolutionists. One could argue that they were not genuine evolutionists, since this supposed evolution would merely display a logically preordered sequence of forms, yet most of them would agree that a sequence of species took place in time. For this reason, Richards<sup>58</sup> convincingly argued that these scientists believed in an evolution of species and highlighted the influence they had on Darwin – via Owen.<sup>59</sup> Ospovat’s interpretation of the genesis of Darwin’s theory could be adduced to support such a claim,<sup>60</sup> since he argued that between formal biologists like Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire or the transcendental morphologists and functional biologists like Cuvier, the first ones were decisive for Darwin since they were showing that adaptation was not always perfect. For transcendental morphologists, adaptation always follows

<sup>57</sup> On the importance of this law for such morphology since Darwin, see Robert Richards, *The Meaning of Evolution: The Morphological Construction and Ideological Reconstruction of Darwin’s Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992). On the history of the ontogeny-phylogeny parallels, see Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977). On transformism in the nineteenth century, see Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century*, 58–118; Corsi, *The Age of Lamarck*.

<sup>58</sup> Richards, *The Meaning of Evolution*; Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 289–310.

<sup>59</sup> Phillip Sloan, “Evolution,” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2008. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evolution/>; Sloan, “Whewell’s Philosophy of Discovery and the Archetype of the Vertebrate Skeleton: The Role of German Philosophy of Science in Richard Owen’s Biology,” *Annals of Science* 60 (2003): 39–61.

<sup>60</sup> Dov Ospovat, “Perfect Adaptation and Teleological Explanation,” *Studies in the History of Biology* 2 (1978): 33–56.

forms, which are like intellectual types, so they cannot be perfect. By contrast, for Cuvier, the plans of organisms were defined by their viability in their environments: so they should be perfect, and any progressive change of some part would disrupt an exquisite adaptation to the settings, and therefore evolution is impossible. But from a Darwinian perspective, the imperfection of adaptation (vestigial organs, etc.) becomes evidence of the historicity of the species (natural selection always acts on what exists, and so, as Jacob famously put it 100 years later, is a “tinkerer,” as Gould strenuously insisted).

Second, Hegel in his philosophy of nature displayed general logical sequences between concepts of the natural sciences. Geology appeared as a condition of life, which also means that nature had a history preceding the apparition of living forms – though Hegel himself denied that nature had a “history,” since this word just concerns “mind,” hence human history.<sup>61</sup> This suggests that science became more and more conscious of a history of abiotic nature going far back before the apparition of man. Already in the eighteenth century, the biblical belief in a 6,000-year-old Earth had been challenged famously by Buffon in his history of Earth and later his *Epochs of Nature* (1779),<sup>62</sup> whose translation had been quite influential in the English- and German-speaking worlds. But in the nineteenth century, geology itself became a science that integrated as one of its main topics the reconstitution of the history of Earth. Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830–4) were seminal in this regard.<sup>63</sup> They credited the Earth with a lifetime of 250,000,000 years, which has been a major condition for Darwinism.<sup>64</sup>

Geology occurred in an essential relation with paleontology. The discovery of fossils in the nineteenth century had been widespread and raised two issues: how to reconstruct the old forms and how to interpret them. Cuvier famously used his principle of the conditions of existence in order to solve the first question, which indirectly gave credence to such principle.<sup>65</sup> Concerning the second issue, he tried to show that extinct forms could be related to extant ones.<sup>66</sup> Hence the extinct forms are variants of extant types and should belong to extant embranchments. If they are extinct now, it is because *catastrophes* occurred. This

<sup>61</sup> Christophe Bouton, *Le procès de l'histoire* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 168–74.

<sup>62</sup> George Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Les époques de la nature* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1779).

<sup>63</sup> Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology* (London: John Murray, 1830–4).

<sup>64</sup> Richard Hooykaas, *The Principle of Uniformity in Geology, Biology and Theology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963); Martin Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 475–520.

<sup>65</sup> Henri Daudin, *Cuvier et Lamarck, les classes zoologiques et l'idée de série animale (1790–1830)* (1923) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 57–68.

<sup>66</sup> Daudin, *Cuvier et Lamarck*. This was intellectually coherent: the principle of the conditions of existence stated, finally, that any radical change of a plan of organization would make it unviable, so there could be no gradual change of species – therefore, extinct species should belong to extant “embranchements” – the four main kinds of plans of organization.



last concept marks the fundamental historicity of nature. In any case, the fact of extinct species, attested by fossils, and the Earth's old age had been from this point on epistemologically entangled, so that they served as reciprocal evidence for each other. The rise of the paradigm of geology<sup>67</sup> therefore uncovers an important question about the uniformity of laws of nature along time. If there have been catastrophes – namely, radical changes in the order of nature – can we infer from our knowledge of how nature currently functions some insights about how it has functioned in the oldest times? Uniformitarians answer that this is correct but that some “catastrophists” would claim that our knowledge of causes and effects according to rules could not apply to the most ancient periods. With Lyell, uniformitarianism won in geology (though in fact Lyell held a rather synthetic position).<sup>68</sup> In the previous century, Kant (1775) claimed that history of nature was a more rational inquiry than “natural history,” since the latter described species of things on the basis of visible signs, whereas the former aimed at uncovering causal processes responsible for why things are the way they are.<sup>69</sup> Kant's appreciation of the history of nature varied as his career progressed<sup>70</sup> and was possibly influenced by the illegitimacy of any questions on the ultimate origins demonstrated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, his method for the history of nature was “analogy,” which clearly supports a case for uniformitarianism. Yet, more generally, the history of nature is already at work in what is usually called the Kant-Laplace hypothesis,<sup>71</sup> namely, the assumption that planets had been originally in a gaseous, chaotic state and that the laws of motion progressively brought into existence the orderly solar system that we now know: here at work is a sort of “genetical perspective,” which explains the current orderly features in nature, as resulting from the long-lasting action of laws of nature upon an initially chaotic state. This epistemology can be applied to any case in a natural context: such as the distribution of planets, geological layers, winds, and oceanic streams.

In such a context, Darwin's theory was of the utmost importance because it included a plausible mechanism to explain the many facts of the biological world, according to a kind of genetical epistemology. The mechanism

<sup>67</sup> Martin Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils: Episodes in the History of Palaeontology* (London: MacDonald, 1972), 175–90; Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time*, 289–94.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 151–76.

<sup>69</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* [1755], Kant, Ak 1:217–368.

<sup>70</sup> Phillip Sloan, “Kant on the History of Nature: The Ambiguous Heritage of the Critical Philosophy for Natural History,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biology and Biomedical Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2006): 627–48.

<sup>71</sup> For example, Kant, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte*, Kant, Ak 1:217–368.

was natural selection and was responsible for at least most of evolution. In 1859, evolution was not an intellectual revolution, given what I just said. But whereas other transformists asserted only very general and untestable schemes of evolution (such as Lamarck's law of complexification, assorted by the "power of circumstances"), Darwin suggested a meaningful explanation, of which he demonstrated the "paramount power." Variation between individuals and between individuals and their offspring, scarcity of resources (hence the "struggle for life"),<sup>72</sup> variation in performances in terms of reproduction and survival, and the inheritance of properties – all those facts could be seen in nature. Darwin had shown that selection of some individuals for their fitness-increasing properties resulted from those premises and thus affected the distribution of such properties in the population. The effect of cumulative selection was therefore a change in the morphology, behavior, and embryology of individuals of a given species, which gave rise to new varieties and ultimately to new species. Artificial selection traditionally performed by breeders provided Darwin with at least a rhetorical analog to this natural process.<sup>73</sup> The logics of the theory did not need a theory of heredity. In fact, biology had to wait for population geneticists in the 1930s to understand that a Mendelian inheritance made such a process effective and to corroborate the hypothesis of natural selection.<sup>74</sup> At the time, many theories, including Darwin's itself (pangenesis), were proposed to explain generation. But Darwin and Wallace's concept of natural selection was neutral in this regard because it involved mainly inter-generational transmission of traits within a population, and not ontogenies of individual organisms. In 1790, in a famous paragraph in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant considered transformism (after Buffon), as suggested by the possibility of a unity of plan across all species. Kant finally concluded that, although logically possible, it was contrary to all evidence since no individual of one species had been seen generating an individual of another variety. The idea of natural selection, seventy years later, had overcome this obstacle since it did not construe the main process by extrapolating facts of individual generation. Evolution from this point onward switched from the domain of intellectual speculations to the field of natural sciences.

<sup>72</sup> The influence of Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* upon Darwin is acknowledged by him and well known. See Peter Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 104–6; Dov Ospovat, *The Development of Darwin's Theory: Natural History, Natural Theology, and Natural Selection, 1838–1859* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 61–73; Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 174–6.

<sup>73</sup> Camille Limoges, *La sélection naturelle* (Paris: Vrin, 1977), 149.

<sup>74</sup> Jean Gayon, *Darwin's Struggle for Survival: Heredity and the Hypothesis of Natural Selection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 315–23.

With Darwinism, adaptation of organisms to their environment could be seen as the result of a process, namely, natural selection, and not merely a brute fact (natural or supernatural) with divine providence, perhaps, offered as an explanation. The diversity of species around the world, which so much impressed Darwin along his journey on the *Beagle* and which was decisive for forming his hypothesis, could be understood along the same lines as the effect of natural selection acting in different environments. The main concepts of morphology, ultimately defined by Owen as analogy and homology, also received a historical interpretation: analogy (like the wings of insects and the wings of birds) attested a similarity of selective processes (adaptation for flight), whereas homology (the wings of birds and the arms of man, both of which are vertebrates) was a sign of descent from a common ancestor. As Darwin claimed, the whole taxonomy of species, with its families and orders, essentially meant a phylogenetic tree, where relations of inclusion were literally relations of descent. Owen's archetype of vertebrates, the ancestor of all vertebrates, came from a pure idea instantiated by various species and reconstructed by the transcendental morphologist: a once-extant individual (or species). After 1860, notwithstanding the controversy with important fixists, such as Agassiz and Owen, many biologists quickly embraced the Darwinian framework. Evolution thus realized a historicization of the main biological concepts, hence its crucial importance for the nineteenth-century life sciences, which had been decisively concerned with the historicity of nature. Yet, instead of temporalizing a chain of being, like earlier speculations on species transformation, Darwin historicized a tree (a set of bushes, as with the current formulation of phylogenetic trees): in this construal of natural historicity as a scientific concept, the connotations of progress and continuity have been somehow lost. The principle of divergence between species came to the fore of Darwinian phylogeny,<sup>75</sup> whereas Darwin himself insisted that because selection is always relative to an environment, progress could not be seen as a law of nature.<sup>76</sup> Yet this last observation may not have been noticed in the earliest phases of Darwinism.

However, two consequences noteworthy for current philosophers must be emphasized:

- (1) The religious rejection of Darwinism (which Freud famously termed one of the three narcissistic wounding of humankind; the others are Copernicus and himself)

<sup>75</sup> Ospovat, *The Development of Darwin's Theory*, 192–207.

<sup>76</sup> Haeckel's insistence on the law of recapitulation, as well as many ambiguous passages in Darwin's notebooks, indicate that such consequences about progress were not clear in the beginnings and even for Darwin himself, for whom a belief in progress may have played a role in the elaboration of the theory (Richards, *The Meaning of Evolution*).

mostly concerned the theory's continuity between animals and man, rather than the process of natural selection. Darwin himself was rather agnostic about the origins of life, and his book could accommodate a kind of theism, which would conceive of a first living amoeba, created by God, then developed according to the laws of natural selection.<sup>77</sup> But in *The Descent of Man* (1871), he logically applied his findings to mankind, merely mentioned in 1859.<sup>78</sup> This work, and his later book the *Expression of Emotions* (1872),<sup>79</sup> were decisive contributions to a naturalist approach to human behavior and cognition.<sup>80</sup> Thinkers like Spencer, already convinced of evolution in nature and man, adopted Darwinism,<sup>81</sup> and the idea of a "struggle for life" quickly pervaded all kinds of sciences.<sup>82</sup> Regarding philosophy, Darwinism gave *naturalism* – namely, vindicating that human facts and institutions should be handled with the same methods as the natural sciences and require no *explanans* unexplainable by them – its most serious legitimization. Enlightenment naturalist thinkers like Diderot (*Rêve de d'Alembert*) or Cabanis (*Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*)<sup>83</sup> claimed that psychology and sociology were parts of physiology or natural history, but they could only rely on similarities between men and other animals (and indeed, one can find similarities between any two things), whereas Darwinism provides an explanation of this continuity. Evolutionism then justifies naturalism at two levels: natural selection is a powerful explanation of many things and should not stop functioning just before mankind emerged (even if Wallace held such a position). The common descent warrants that, even if some of our features are shown not to be products of selection, they may still be affected by what we inherited from primates and may call for a naturalistic explanation. In this sense, there is no wonder that dialectical materialists such as Marx and Engels would praise Darwin's idea of evolution. Materialism is a manifold metaphysical option – the basis of which is the credo that nothing exists except the simplest elements of matter and what is composed of or reducible to them – and it does not reduce to naturalism (which can be just an epistemology). However, with Darwin's making evolution more scientific, materialism received strong backing and added to cell theory; and organic chemistry, which

<sup>77</sup> This is a way to understand the word "breathed" in the famous last sentence of the *Origin of Species*: "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved."

<sup>78</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871).

<sup>79</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872).

<sup>80</sup> Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 151–69; Tim Lewens, *Darwin* (London: Routledge, 2007), 129–46.

<sup>81</sup> See Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories*.

<sup>82</sup> After its initial success, the *Origin* had several editions; in the latest, Spencer convinced Darwin to use "survival of the fittest" often instead of "natural selection" – a term that would carry connotations of a great selector and connotations of a teleological understanding. However, such substitutions raised bigger problems for philosophers, since they raised the objection that the theory was tautological, the "fittest" only meaning in the end those who survived.

<sup>83</sup> Denis Diderot, *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* (Paris, 1830) ; Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* (Paris: Crapart, Caille & Ravier, 1802).

was developed at the end of the century by Du Bois-Reymond, Liebig, and other German chemists, could in the end of the century claim its dominance upon metaphysical options compatible with natural sciences.<sup>84</sup>

- (2) Natural sciences can be defined as the knowledge of what regularly occurs (Aristotle), or, in a more modern way, as the uncovering of laws of nature. To this extent, they have often been opposed to historical knowledge, which studies individual, singular events<sup>85</sup> and relies on a narrative understanding different from the nomothetically oriented understanding proper to natural sciences. The famous opposition of *Naturwissenschaften* as explaining (i.e., subsuming under laws) and *Geisteswissenschaften* as understanding, elaborated by Dilthey<sup>86</sup> and discussed continuously in the next century, is yielded by such an intuitive characterization of natural sciences. However, the present sketch of nineteenth-century natural sciences makes clear that this way of framing the distinction is not accurate, since natural sciences also include a historical dimension. Darwinism as the achievement of a historicization of nature illustrates perfectly such a point: while it suggests a process (natural selection) as an explanation of many facts, yet such an explanation cannot be put to work except in the context of a historical knowledge about phylogeny provided by geology and paleontology.

### *Ensembles and Individuals*

Defining the specificity of Darwinism, Ernst Mayr famously insisted that it inaugurated *population thinking* in biology. Whereas this is historically controversial in connection with Darwin,<sup>87</sup> it is right that the idea of natural selection requires using populations of diverse individuals and the varying heritable traits of those individuals as units of analysis. Individual differences are not just nonmeaningful variations around an essential type of the species, and possibly negligible, since without them there would be no selection and therefore no evolution. Even if Darwin did not have the statistical tools to handle formally the problems raised here and to answer some objections to his hypothesis of natural selection,<sup>88</sup> this population-oriented approach differed genuinely from the type-oriented view of traditional morphologists.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> About this scientific materialism, see Rueger's "Conceptions of the Natural World, 1790–1870" (Chapter 6, this volume).

<sup>85</sup> For example, Henri Poincaré, *La science et l'hypothèse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1902); trans. B. Halsted as *Science and Hypothesis* (New York: Science Press, 1913), 168.

<sup>86</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften: Versuch einer Grundlegung für das Studium der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte* (1883), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008).

<sup>87</sup> Gayon, *Darwin's Struggle*, 400; André Ariew, "Population Thinking," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Biology*, ed. M. Ruse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 77–82.

<sup>88</sup> Essentially the objection (formulated by the engineer Fleeming Jenkin) is that in large populations a successful variant has many chances to be lost. Population geneticists of the 1930s would require a sophisticated tool to refute the objection.

<sup>89</sup> For example, Owen, *The Hunterian Lectures*, and Louis Agassiz, *The Classification of Insects from Embryological Data* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1850).

Interestingly, the population-oriented view arose many times in the natural sciences in the second part of the century. Mendel's theory of inheritance is a clear case of a treatment of processes that seeks laws, not at the level of the behavior of individuals – namely, individual peas that are reproducing – but at the level of populations. The so-called Mendel's laws, named after him but of course rediscovered around 1900 by de Vries, Correns, and Tschermak, concern the mere frequencies of two types of individuals of pure lineages in successive interbreeding generations, whereas nothing can be predicted except in probabilistic language about what offspring would come from a given pea. The other case of a population-oriented approach has been statistical mechanics, elaborated much more mathematically by Maxwell, then essentially Boltzmann and Gibbs. This field has been an ongoing major topic for philosophers of science since it raises decisive issues about determinism, probabilities, and reductionism.<sup>90</sup> The kinetic of gases treats a gas as a population of molecules, each behaving in a deterministic way – that is, its state at time  $t'$  is wholly and uniquely determined by the states of the system at previous times  $t$  – but in a way very difficult to describe, given that they are small and numerous. However, provided some plausible assumptions about their behavior (e.g., no direction of movement is on the average privileged, the molecules are in contact, etc.) the gas itself as a system of molecules can be nomothetically described according to the variations of some parameters that describe it (e.g., temperature, energy, entropy; see next paragraph for discussion of these terms). In this sense, even if we do not know the behavior of individuals, we can still formulate the laws that rule the behavior of their ensemble. Boltzmann tried many times to find the genuine justifications for such an approach; it implies probability theory and some versions of the law of large numbers. Given that foundations of probability theory were not laid down until the next century by Kolmogorov, and that Boltzmann sometimes appeals to the ergodic hypothesis (i.e., a system that in its course cuts across all states of the phase space), which was still a conjecture and was not always valid, it is no wonder that the foundations of statistical mechanics were unclear and difficult. However, it was a major achievement in the natural sciences, since it demonstrates that probabilistic descriptions of individuals could lead to laws about their populations. It also implied that a system in physics could be described either in terms of its constituents or in terms of state variables. This is also the case in mechanics, with old Newtonian formulations and later work by Lagrange and then Hamilton in terms of functions. But statistical mechanics, with its probabilistic

<sup>90</sup> Lawrence Sklar, *Physics and Chance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Michael Strevens, *Bigger Than Chaos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

descriptions at the levels of individuals, had shown how understanding the equivalence between those descriptions could be problematic.

### *Extending the Scope*

A feature of the progress of sciences in the nineteenth century is an increase of the scope of knowledge in time, as we have seen with geology, as well as with space – as is clear with the progressive uncovering of both distant planets and galaxies. (Herschel discovered Uranus in 1781, Le Verrier and Adams discovered Neptune in 1846 after its prediction on the basis of discrepancies in Uranus's orbit.) But also inversely, with cell theory, the discovery of microbes, and the emergence of pastorian microbiology (Latour),<sup>91</sup> more and more invisible entities entered into the realm of science. This is not just a question of the extension of the scale of scientific entities (macro vs. micro). Wilfrid Sellars famously opposed the “scientific image,” the picture of the world as construed by the natural sciences, to the “manifest image” embedded in our ordinary experience and language.<sup>92</sup> The two images are increasingly distant, and a philosopher's task consists in articulating them. While obvious nowadays – think of a description of the world by quantum physics in terms of indeterministically behaving quarks, fractally dimensioned spaces, and so forth – such a distinction had arisen in the nineteenth century. Most of the main concepts used by physicists after 1850 do not belong to our ordinary schemes: entropy, energy in thermodynamics; electricity and magnetism investigated as waves by Maxwell, and therefore connected to light. Such a move began with Lavoisier-style chemistry, which substituted for water, fire, et cetera, “simple bodies” like oxygen that were not to be found in experience since empirically attestable entities were mostly composed of them – such as water from  $H_2O$ . When physicists in the 1890s debated about whether matter was ultimately corpuscles or energy – this last option defended by Duhem<sup>93</sup> or Ostwald, before the triumph of atomism in the next century – they referred to entities that would in any case not be found in ordinary experience. The Vienna Circle's thesis that science is the understanding of the world on the basis of empirical evidence through logic, and the subsequent opposition between observable and

<sup>91</sup> Both extensions of our grasp of entities relied on technical advances: telescopes and microscopes. Using the latter remained controversial until the 1830s; even Bichat criticized their use. Such reluctance is understandable if we consider how imperfect the eighteenth-century microscopes were, because many artifacts were inexorably included in their systems.

<sup>92</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,” in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, ed. R. Colodny (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 1–40.

<sup>93</sup> Pierre Duhem, *La théorie physique, son objet, sa structure*. Paris: Vrin, 1906).

theoretical entities, obviously took the measure of the situation in science, whose discourse since the 1850s became populated by theoretical terms.

Granted, scientists did not wait until 1800 to talk about invisible things; after all, even Leibniz – not to mention Aristotle – talked about energy. The Enlightenment took Newtonian physics as the model of science, and after 1750, one witnesses a proliferation of “forces” in the style of Newtonian forces like attraction, which are supposed to account for any aspect of the world.<sup>94</sup> Yet, the widening of the list of theoretical entities is arguably a feature of the nineteenth century: when eighteenth-century scientists speak of heat as “calorique,” matter responsible for the increase of temperature, in the same way that water increases wetness, this is much closer to our ordinary picture of the world than a thermodynamic theory of heat as a form of energy that achieves a highest degree of entropy. Moreover, this second notion does not stand by itself: it is only understandable in the context of the principle of conservation of energy, which was discovered in the 1860s concomitantly by Meyer, Ludwig, and Helmholtz,<sup>95</sup> and the demonstration by Sadi Carnot (1811, *Réflexions sur la puissance motrice du feu*) that there is no perpetual motion: that is, the energy output/input ratio is always below 1. In this sense, “heat” is not a primitive notion, uncovering an entity analogous to water, and the relation between the empirically observable “heat” and the scientific statements where it occurs becomes much more sophisticated. Entropy as a thermodynamic concept is defined in terms of the energy that cannot be used to do thermodynamic work, a definition involving considerations of heat, which are rather unintuitive. And such sophistication in general requires mathematics: waves are not understandable except in the context of sinusoidal functions; entropy can be understood through the mathematics of probability distributions (the second principle of thermodynamics is demonstrated by Boltzmann on the basis of the higher number of equiprobable states realizing a homogeneous distribution of molecules). Such inflation of theoretical entities within scientific statements is not proper to physics: “hereditary determinants” postulated by Mendelism are also entities postulated to make sense of mathematically stated regularities. Once again, I do not claim that mathematics arrived in natural sciences in the nineteenth century (which is of course absurd), but that at this time there was a multiplication of theoretical entities definable only through mathematics, and of entities out of human reach in space and time. This could be a way of

<sup>94</sup> Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 14–25.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Kuhn, “Energy Conservation as an Example of Simultaneous Discovery,” in *Critical Problems in the History of Science*, ed. M. Clagett (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 321–56.



rephrasing the Kuhnian fact that most of the natural sciences founded their first paradigm in this century.

#### SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHICAL ACCOUNTS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY NATURAL SCIENCES

The development of natural sciences in the nineteenth century raised many of the issues that philosophy of science constituted as its proper topics in the next century: the issue of reductionism, the question of whether science is deterministic or stochastic, the nature of narrative knowledge as compared to nomothetic knowledge, and the status of theoretical entities. All the achievements considered in the previous section constituted an idea of “nature” as an object of natural sciences that contrasted with “nature” as understood in the triad natural philosophy/theology/history. Kant’s reform of metaphysics implied that no guarantee of a *mathesis universalis* would be provided to researchers, previously called “natural philosophers,” that would encompass the whole of natural riddles, and that human reason (*lumen naturale*) could not be thought as ipso facto capable of grasping a priori natural structures because of its origin in a theological warrant of both truth and lawlikeness of nature. From 1790 onward, henceforth philosophy prescribed for itself the necessity of inventing new perspectives on the possibility, difficulties, and achievements of the emerging natural sciences. Kant’s own critical stance has been the first one elaborated, toward which – especially in German philosophy – most of the following elaborations have been reactions.

#### *The Idea of a Philosophy of Nature*

The program that people like Schelling, Hegel, or Schopenhauer undertook, under the general name of “philosophy of nature,” consisted in unraveling a meaning of nature that was strictly immanent in it and still was not grasped by the natural sciences because by definition they used the language of mathematics. Yet such meaning, according to the Kantian critical delimitation of nature, would not lead to any transcendent being. The whole topic of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is what is in excess upon laws of nature<sup>96</sup> – formal or objective

<sup>96</sup> Such excess in Kantian terms can be put in terms of irreducibility of the particular (singular objects ruled by universal laws of nature) and the general. “The universal supplied by our (human) understanding does not determine the particular; therefore even if different things agree in common characteristic, the variety of ways in which they may come before our perception is contingent. For our understanding is a power of concepts, i.e., a discursive understanding, so that is must indeed be contingent for it as to what the character and all the variety of the particular may be that can be given to it in nature and that can be brought under its concepts”

purposiveness, that is, what is contingent regarding the laws of nature, beauty, or organisms. It thus provided a decisive condition for such a project. In effect, by acknowledging that the whole of nature is not encompassed by laws, which are the proper topic of natural sciences, the *Critique* defines in turn a territory for a discourse about nature that will not be the mathematical unveiling of laws, but rather tries to decipher a meaning in nature. Thus, it could be called a “hermeneutics of nature,” which clearly appeared possible on such Kantian grounds, although it could no longer be a *Kantian* hermeneutic.<sup>97</sup> The *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling, Baader, Steffens, and others in the beginning was actually concerned with phenomena such as chemistry, electricity, magnetism, and so forth, whose scientific understanding seemed to exceed mathematical formulations. This concern was somehow parallel to Kant’s concern with life science in the third *Critique* but extended to all those disciplines then untouched by mathematics.

Kant’s position regarding natural sciences consists in explicating how their basic concepts are grounded in the possibility of experience, or in the possibility of the kind of knowledge they concern (for instance, natural purposiveness in biology). By contrast, a hermeneutics of nature demonstrates the necessity of the concepts of natural sciences, as well as their cohesion, in the sense that taken together they display the meaning of nature and its place within the whole of knowledge and, generally, within the self-understanding of the philosophical subject. It duplicates natural sciences with a second, nonmathematical, meaning, ascribing to each concept and each region of nature its place within nature in general.

Because it stemmed from Kantian analyses of the difference between laws in general science and laws such as purposiveness, such an analysis focused on biology. It had extensively relied on Kiehmayer’s program of a systematic zoology and on Goethe’s view on morphology,<sup>98</sup> in which the articulation between organism and mechanisms had been central for philosophers of

(Ak 5, §77, 406). For Kant, the notion of reflective judgment articulates the ways through which our power of knowledge deals with such excess in its various forms.

<sup>97</sup> Such a perspective is argued for in Philippe Huneman, “From the *Critique of Judgment* to the Hermeneutics of Nature: Sketching the Fate of the Philosophy of Nature after Kant” *Continental Philosophy Review* 39, no. 1 (2006): 1–34.

<sup>98</sup> Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 141–9, and John Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 309–32, ascribe an important role to Herder in the reaction to Kantian transcendentalism and the turn toward nature; Herder and Goethe worked together on morphology in the late 1880s. For the biological side of *Naturphilosophie*, a detailed account of Goethe and Schelling’s theories, as well as an explanation of the role of Kiehmayer and Johann Christian Reill, see Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, 238–89.

nature. Generally, they held that such difference of concepts used by scientists could be philosophically reduced to an identity, since each meaning of a mechanism would only be achieved in organisms. Typically, Schelling writes: “The things are not the principle of the organisms, but inversely, the organism is the principle of things. The essence of all things (that are not simple phenomena, but approximate individuality in an infinite succession of degrees) is life; the type of life is accidental, and even what is dead in nature is not dead in itself, it is only latent life.”<sup>99</sup> Hermeneutics of nature in various ways claims that the meaning of physics is only given by biology. It holds an organicist, holistic view of the whole of nature.<sup>100</sup> Although it may remind one of the vitalistic Enlightenment syntheses of natural sciences made by Cabanis or Diderot, this view is structurally different: “Enlightenment vitalists”<sup>101</sup> do not begin with ontological assertions about elementary entities and their properties, but are concerned with the *conceptual* possibility of natural science, namely, the categories of organism and mechanism. Hence, while Enlightenment vitalists finally held a claim in natural philosophy, saying that everything is made of living-sentient elements, “philosophy of nature” holds a holistic interpretation of the natural sciences, maintaining that organisms and life are the overarching categories through which they get their complete meaning.

However, philosophy is not an unbounded invention of categories and does not aim to govern the natural sciences, notwithstanding the usual description of *Naturphilosophie*, which is the Schellingian mode of hermeneutics of nature. Thus, the *Naturphilosophen* also used experiments and enriched natural science and had been highly influential on science itself. Owen, for example, confessed that Oken had been a major source of inspiration for him, while Oken’s work was of the most speculative *naturphilosophisch* kind.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1798), *Werke*, ed. O. Weiss, 3 vols (Leipzig: Eckhardt, 1907), 596. For a detailed account of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, see Rueger, Chapter 6, this volume). On the differences between Kant and Fichte concerning *Naturphilosophie*, see also Joan Steigerwald, “The Dynamics of Reason and Its Elusive Object in Kant, Schelling, Fichte,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 34 (2003): 125–133. On nature as an organism for Schelling, see Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 515–20.

<sup>100</sup> For example, Oken’s *Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie*: “but everything to which one can attribute life exists or manifests itself through its polar motion, in other words through life. Being and life are inseparable concepts” (*Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie*, 3 vols. [Jena: F. Frommann, 1809–11], §87).

<sup>101</sup> Peter Hanns Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 137–42; 159–65.

<sup>102</sup> See Rueger (Chapter 6, this volume) on *Naturphilosophie*’s scientific achievements. Also, one could argue with Leon S. Jacyna, “Romantic Thought and the Origins of Cell Theory,” in *Romanticism and the Sciences*, eds. A. Cunningham and N. Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 161–8, that some important advances such as cell theory had been made possible by *Naturphilosophie* theories, which held that organic nature must have a very

Philosophy of nature, within such a hermeneutical approach of the natural sciences, holds an attitude toward sciences that can be opposed to Kant's. For Fichte, Hegel, or Schelling, who strove to assign to Kant's fundamental dualities a higher unique origin, the content of intuition was not alien to thought. Therefore, the very content of science, not only the concepts, required a philosophical assessment: whereas Kant merely exposes the meanings and the limits of concepts like natural purposes, philosophy of nature must also deduce (something about) the content. Yet this general philosophical attitude can be divided into several systematic positions. At one extreme, the position of Schelling and *Naturphilosophie* is strictly speaking a complete hermeneutics for the natural sciences: all the concepts and contents of those sciences can be interpreted in philosophy. This means that philosophy "constructs" the objects that the sciences had taken as given – such as molecules, physical forces, and animals – by showing that they necessarily stem from previous conceptual steps. In return, the phenomena empirically treated by natural sciences are given their legitimate scope: namely, the way they pervade all levels of nature. Chemistry or magnetism, for example, was a universal kind of process that philosophers showed to be pervasive within nature.<sup>103</sup>

At the other extreme, Hegel's position regarding science in his *Philosophy of Nature* (in the *Encyclopedia*) was less deflationary. He was one of the most severe critiques of *Naturphilosophie* because he did not agree that all the facts of the natural sciences could receive a philosophical meaning and enter into a synthesis. According to the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this would lead to an "empty formalism," applying the categories of chemistry or magnetism arbitrarily at any level. Rather, philosophy must understand the logical necessity through which concepts of the natural sciences proceed from each other but cannot assume that such a logic is perfectly realized at each level in

elementary level made of the simplest organic elements. Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life*, 195–246, traced the historical connections between Schwann and *Naturphilosophie*, via Johannes Müller and Von Baer. Johannes Müller, the leading physiologist (e.g., Oswei Temkin, "Basic Science, Medicine and the Romantic Era," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 37, no. 2 [1963]: 97–129; Everett Mendelsohn, "Physical Models and Physiological Concepts: Explanation in Nineteenth-Century Biology," in *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, eds. M. Cohen and M. Wartofsky [Dordrecht: Reidel, 1965]: 127–150), elaborated a theory of the energies proper to the senses, which was inspired by *Naturphilosophie*'s idea of mind acting within nature, and which became a hot topic of discussion for Helmholtz and other physiologists. Many of the important scientists after 1850 were from Müller's lab.

<sup>103</sup> "As was their wont, the *Naturphilosophen* generalized their definition of philosophical chemistry into a universal principle characterizing all phenomena, discovering oxidation and phlogistication everywhere in nature, which accounted, not only for 'combustion and decombustion,' but also for the 'antithesis between the sun and the planets.' Chemistry therefore took a totally new meaning. Oken, for example, spoke of a 'universal chemistry' (*Weltchemismus*). (*Universum als Fortsetzung*, 17)" (Hanns, *Vitalizing Nature*, 211).

nature.<sup>104</sup> Certain facts are somehow contingent, missing from such logics, and this is a necessary state of affairs because it proceeds from the very meaning of nature. As such, nature is indeed *finite*, because it is not for itself what it is in itself, namely, the concepts (“mind” is “for itself what it is in itself”; therefore, nature is a process through which it finds its truth in “mind”). Hegel calls the natural sciences “finite sciences,” not only because they do not deduce the meaning of what they are dealing with (since they just take it as given, and such a “deduction” is precisely the role of philosophy), but also because they are sciences of a finite object. Therefore, nature has an essential *Ohmacht*, which is reflected by the incapacity of the natural sciences to understand everything through its concepts. Weakness here comes from nature, not from the scientific mind, and philosophy has to understand both the meaning in nature and the limits of such meaning, namely, where it ceases to be meaningful.<sup>105</sup>

Between these two extremes – constructing nature or grasping the traces of the Concept in nature – are other possible positions for philosophy of nature, for example, Schopenhauer’s position, which seeks within the natural sciences facts that will converge with his own metaphysics and provide a kind of supplementary evidence for it. Philosophy hence has to systematize all facts established by the natural sciences, and theories developed by them, which are likely to display will in nature and be interpretable through the metaphysics of will as the absolute, standing beyond representation.<sup>106</sup>

### *Methodology, Epistemology, and Positivism*

However, reinterpreting the whole of nature, while still a powerful scheme in the philosophy of nature (pervasive until Bergson and Husserl), does not exhaust the possible attitudes of philosophy toward sciences. Clearly, suspicions about Idealism after 1830 in Germany (famously attested by critiques of Hegelianism developed by Feuerbach, Marx, Kierkegaard, etc.) and the

<sup>104</sup> Kenneth Westphal, “Philosophizing about Nature: Hegel’s Philosophical Project,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 303–9.

<sup>105</sup> As Hegel said in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, whether there are 56 or 57 species of parrots does not matter to reason; it is plainly contingent, and what matters to philosophy is how the main concepts of ornithology, for example, are occurring within the whole system of biological knowledge.

<sup>106</sup> Bichat’s physiology established that passions are proper to organic life and do not belong to animal life, and that passions affect organic life only secondarily. This was taken by Schopenhauer as an independent corroboration, from the scientific side, of the metaphysical distinction he made between Representation (conscience, law of effect, etc.) and Will (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [1848], in *Sämtliche Werke*, vols. 2 and 3, ed. Arthur Hübscher. [Mannheim: Brockhaus, 1988], Suppl. 10).

emergence of theories that were not taken into account by those hermeneutic syntheses encouraged other positions of philosophy toward science to arise thereafter. Typically, Helmholtz then said that the proper task of philosophy was to investigate knowledge rather than to theorize about nature. The extension of the scope of theoretical entities, mentioned previously, called for an increased specialization, which rendered the very project of synthesizing the sciences of nature less and less feasible, at the time it gained its highest articulation in Hegel's and Schelling's systems.

Non-German countries, whose philosophers were not so heavily invested in the controversies about Kantianism, have not been so impressed by philosophy of nature and have considered other philosophical stances regarding natural sciences. Comte's positivism has also been a wide-ranging synthesis, trying to see in each science the way it proceeds from unscientific, religious concepts to a scientific, nomothetic law-oriented understanding of its phenomena. This is accomplished by way of a "metaphysical" period, where unintentional agents ("causes") were sought everywhere, according to a general law of spiritual development called *loi des trois états*. In this sense, philosophy must uncover within each science what are its main principles, on the basis of a thorough examination of its history. Another less wide-ranging synthesis was proposed by Cournot. For him, the sciences use concepts that are not wholly explicated, and philosophy solves metaphysical issues through their explication. The clearest example is the case of determinism: in biology, physics, and human sciences, causal statements are uttered, yet different necessities or kinds of cause are at work. In *Matérialisme, Vitalisme, Rationalisme* (1875), Cournot actually investigates how forces, causes, vital principles or entelechies, and reasons, are different causal principles, which are differently related to determinism and chance.<sup>107</sup> Here, as in the philosophy of nature, philosophy is both interpretative, in trying to understand what concepts mean, and also critical, as when concepts are not used according to such meanings science has to be revised. This ambiguity between its explanatory purpose and a normative role generally characterized philosophy of science from the moment it constituted itself as a philosophical discipline, as distinct from epistemology, at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>108</sup>

A last option is a logical and methodological stance: namely, an orientation toward the reasons why science is "truth-telling." John Stuart Mill undertook

<sup>107</sup> Antoine Augustin Cournot, *Matérialisme, Vitalisme, Rationalisme: Essai sur l'emploi des données de la science en philosophie* (Paris: Hachette, 1875).

<sup>108</sup> Alan Richardson, "'The Fact of Science' and Critique of Knowledge: Exact Science as Problem and Resource in Marburg Neo-Kantianism," in *The Kantian Legacy in Nineteenth Century Science*, eds. M. Friedman and A. Nordmann (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 211–27.

such an examination of the methods of natural sciences in his *System of Logic, Deductive and Inductive*.<sup>109</sup> Being an empiricist, Mill denied that necessary connections hold between events; the only necessity is displayed in logics and consists in the decomposition of our knowledge (in the sense that the generally necessary entails particulars). Deductions just ensure the conservation of truth, but inductive statements are used in gaining knowledge. As such, they are always fallible, but we ought to engage in them since they are the only way we can understand the natural world. The rules of scientific method evolve from those spontaneous inductions made by humans as natural creatures. They unveil patterns that we hold for laws, on the basis of which we make inferences. It happens that the uncovering of patterns is often a successful basis for predictions. Laws are generalized in a law about laws, namely, the “law of universal causation.” A method of experimental inference<sup>110</sup> can thus be devised. Its main focus is the choice and selection of hypotheses, which is done through experiments designed to eliminate possible hypotheses, until just one remains. Mill shows that such a process assumes, first, that one hypothesized mechanism is true (the principle of determinism); second, that the true cause belongs to a set of hypothesis within our reach (the principle of limited variety). The crux of Mill’s demonstration is that these principles of the method are themselves corroborated each time the method succeeds: a circle that makes experimental method more and more robust.

Induction was also at the center of the work of Mill’s opponent, William Whewell, who drew on a thorough examination of the history of sciences. Yet Whewell had a wider conception of induction, in which confirmation is of various sorts: prediction, coherence, and “consilience.”<sup>111</sup> This last test means “the evidence in favor of our induction is of a much higher and more forcible character when it enables us to explain and determine cases of a *kind different* from those which were contemplated in the formation of our hypothesis. The instances in which this has occurred, indeed, impress us with a conviction that the truth of our hypothesis is certain.”<sup>112</sup> Whereas Mill’s principles of induction are corroborated by the success of previous inductions, Whewell’s idea of supported induction rests on its abilities to bring together facts of various kinds, even if it infers unobservable causes. Mill criticized the idea because it allows

<sup>109</sup> John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (1843), in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963–91), vols. 7–8, bk. III.

<sup>110</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic*, bk. II, chap. 9.

<sup>111</sup> Laura Snyder, “Whewell and the Scientists: Science and Philosophy of Science in Nineteenth-century Britain,” in *History and Philosophy of Science: New Trends and Perspectives*, eds. M. Heidelberger and F. Stadler (Dordrecht: Kluwer Press, 2002), 81–94.

<sup>112</sup> Whewell, *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*, 87–8.

hypotheses to be accepted, even though they are not the only ones remaining, as others have not all been eliminated. He especially objected in cases where causes that have never been observed are mentioned, for example, too small or too distant causes.<sup>113</sup> Given the proliferation of theoretical entities at this period, Whewell's notion of consilience has been an influential framework for scientists aiming at justifying their methods. Among them, Darwin was the most prominent case,<sup>114</sup> since the hypothesis of natural selection claims its validity on the basis of its ability to colligate facts of heterogeneous disciplines.

Scientific method appeared therefore throughout the century as the object of philosophical debate. Scientists themselves joined this concern and contributed actively to the definition and justification of methodological requisites. Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* famously codified experimental method on the basis of his systematic practice of experimental physiology. Determinism appeared in this context as a major methodological concept: it paralleled Mill's idea of a principle of determinism yielding the induction for causes, since its presupposition allows scientists to pinpoint "*les déterminisms*," in the sense of sufficient mechanisms underlying the phenomena. In 1664, Spinoza's idea of generalized necessary connections was a metaphysical principle justified by the a priori consideration of what are substances and attributes.<sup>115</sup> With Kant, under the description "each event has a cause from which it follows according to a rule,"<sup>116</sup> determinism becomes a transcendental principle for any knowledge and experience. Now, with Bernard, under the description "same cause, same effects," determinism yields the justification of the experimental method of empirical sciences. For without it, one could not use the method of controlled experiments or demand repeatable experiments. Therefore, it seems that the methodological and epistemological concern of philosophers, paralleling the scientists' worry, raised issues about necessary determinations in natural sciences that progressed to metaphysical questions about necessity in nature. Such a move announced the way that philosophy of science in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would investigate classical metaphysical questions. It could be seen as a major effect of the transformation sketched earlier, which turned "natural philosophy" – embedded as it was in a

<sup>113</sup> On the disagreements between Whewell and Mill, see Laura Snyder, *Reforming Philosophy: A Victorian Debate on Science and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>114</sup> Sloan, "Evolution"; C. Kenneth Waters, "The Arguments in the *Origin of Species*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, eds. J. Hodge and G. Radic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 116–39.

<sup>115</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *The Collected Writings of Spinoza*, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), vol. 1, bk. I (*Ethica*, I).

<sup>116</sup> Friedman, "Causal Laws."



triadic structure that metaphysically founded it in a divine understanding and epistemologically assumed a *mathesis universalis* – into *natural science*.

### CONCLUSIONS

The regime under which, both sociologically and conceptually, the natural sciences were practiced in the nineteenth century deeply changed from the classical and Enlightenment periods. Philosophy in the same time participated in such change, since Kant aimed to assess it. His third *Critique* (1790s) had a major role in this endeavor, and many philosophers' works can be understood as a development and critique of the Kantian achievement, especially the program known as philosophy of nature, which had close ties with research practice of morphologists and physicians.

To this extent, many positions of philosophy vis-à-vis science were invented and developed during the century, which made it possible to formulate and answer the challenges raised by advances of various natural sciences under their new regime at this time: the role of determinism and predictability especially in multilayered systems, the historicity of nature, the multiplication of theoretical entities, and their embedding in a more and more sophisticated mathematical apparatus.

In this context, a specifically epistemological and methodological approach of science arose as a way to solve difficulties met by scientists facing those challenges. In some sense it paralleled the hermeneutical approach that emerged in the wake of the Kantian delimitation of the space of knowledge. One could argue that, in this sense, two main philosophical approaches of science emerged in the next century: a hermeneutic one that inspired the *Lebensphilosophie*, or biological philosophies, manifested in works by Bergson, Dilthey, Whitehead, Hans Jonas, or Marjorie Greene, and the multifaceted discipline – in both the conceptual and institutional senses of the term – named “philosophy of science” stemmed from those two general attitudes toward science. The foundational questions (about the foundations of knowledge) that appealed to metaphysics and theology in the classical mathesis-oriented structure of knowledge would now have to be dealt with in a novel conceptual space.

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## **IV**

### **MIND, LANGUAGE, AND CULTURE**





## PSYCHOLOGY

GARY HATFIELD

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, psychology was the study of the soul or mind, or, with greater ontological modesty, of mental powers, capacities, and phenomena. Insofar as these investigations concerned mind as substance and its relation to the body, they were metaphysical. Insofar as they concerned the cognitive abilities of the mind and the basis of and limits to human knowledge, they were epistemological (a term coined in the 1840s). Insofar as they concerned the description and explanation of various psychological phenomena, they were studies in empirical and theoretical psychology, which may be called *scientific psychology*, where “science” connotes empirical or natural science, that is, systematic knowledge based in observation or experience.

The quantitative experimental scientific psychology that became prominent by the turn of the twentieth century grew from three main areas of intellectual inquiry. First and most directly, it arose out of the traditional psychology of the philosophy curriculum, as expressed in theories of mind and cognition. Second, it adopted the attitudes of the new natural philosophy of the scientific revolution, attitudes of empirically driven causal analysis and exact observation and experimentation. Third, it drew upon investigations of the senses. Natural philosophical disciplines such as optics and acoustics treated the functioning of the senses. Optics, in particular, had from antiquity comprised a complete theory of vision, combining the physics, physiology, psychology, metaphysics, and epistemology of vision, using mathematical techniques where feasible. Within medicine, sensory physiology examined anatomy, physiology, and pathology. Philosophical psychology had long examined the senses as mental capacities connected with cognition and knowledge, and such discussions also heeded the new attitudes of natural philosophy.

These three areas, philosophy, natural science, and sensory physiology, were synthesized during the nineteenth century to engender the new, quantitative experimental psychology. This synthesis occurred especially in Germany, the work of Johannes Müller, Hermann Lotze, Gustav Fechner, Hermann Helmholtz, Georg Elias Müller, and Wilhelm Wundt being preeminent. A similar

synthesis – although initially without quantitative experimentation – was promoted somewhat earlier in Britain by Thomas Brown, James Mill, Alexander Bain, and Herbert Spencer. Especially in Spencer's version, this British synthesis emphasized mind as a biological adaptation for adjusting the organism to its immediate circumstances, an attitude that was further promoted by the rise of Darwinism and its subsequent spread to Germany and America.

The German and British syntheses were developments and transformations of existing theory. The "new psychology" drew heavily from earlier British and German analytical associationism. The growth in experimental technique did not immediately lead to a revolution in theory but rather enabled testing and extension of existing theories. New theoretical ideas arose from considering the biological function of the senses and from analysis of the mind as a biological adaptation (as in Spencer and Darwin). As the new psychology developed, it distinguished its own theories of mental phenomena from the epistemological interests that it ceded to philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter first examines the early relations of psychology to biology and characterizes various eighteenth-century loci of psychological thought. It then pursues nineteenth-century developments in Germany and Britain that culminate in the "new" psychology of the 1860s and 1870s.

<sup>1</sup> This historiography contrasts with the still-dominant story drawn from E. G. Boring's *History of Experimental Psychology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950) and going back to Théodule Ribot, *English Psychology*, anon. trans. (New York: Appleton, 1874) and *German Psychology of To-Day*, trans. James Mark Baldwin (New York: Scribner's, 1886). Boring and Ribot rightly acknowledge that the "new psychology" had origins in both philosophy and physiology, but they portray it as escaping from philosophy during the 1870s and 1880s by abandoning metaphysics in favor of facts. Their historiography downplays the theoretical continuity between the old and new psychologies, overlooks the continuing influence on psychological theorizing of metaphysical questions pertaining to the mind-body relation, and fails to acknowledge the new division of labor between psychology and epistemology. Klaus Sachs-Hombach, *Philosophische Psychologie im 19. Jahrhundert: Entstehung und Problemgeschichte* (Munich: Freiburg, 1993), provides a corrective in examining the relations between epistemologically oriented psychology and "scientific" psychology. Sachs-Hombach sees three main methodological trends in the first half of the nineteenth century: increased emphasis on an experiential basis, the use of developmental reasoning to build explanations of normal adult psychology, and an intermittent return to metaphysics in securing theoretical foundations. These trends found expression in two opposed theoretical tendencies: a mechanistic tendency to explain mental phenomena as combinations of atomistic mental elements (Herbart and his followers) and an organic and holistic tendency to treat psychic life as developing through a teleological drive to unity and comprehensiveness of knowledge. The former led to psychology as an exact natural science, the latter to phenomenology. From my perspective, the drive toward elements was an extension of eighteenth-century Newtonian methods as found in Hartley, Hume, and Bonnet; the organic viewpoint blossomed within the German Romantic response to Kant (as Sachs-Hombach suggests) but was extended by the functional analysis of sensory physiologists responding to Kant (e.g., by Tourtual) and entered scientific psychology. In my view, Sachs-Hombach finds more antipathy to metaphysics and less continued interchange between philosophy and psychology in the latter nineteenth century than was there.

## PSYCHOLOGY: LIFE AND MIND

The curriculum of early modern universities echoed an Aristotelian organization of knowledge, even after its content altered to reflect early modern innovations in philosophy and natural science. Psychology was, therefore, initially classified as a branch of “physics,” that is, of the science of nature in general. This classification was challenged during the eighteenth century, when psychology was variously seen as a separate discipline coordinate with physics, as a branch of metaphysics, or as a “moral” science.

Conceptually, Aristotelian psychology regarded the *psyche*, or soul, as a vivifying principle having three main powers: vegetative, sensory, and intellectual or rational. The cognitive capacities associated with the sensory and intellectual powers were higher manifestations of a vital or living principle common to all living things, including plants. The Cartesian philosophy challenged the unity of the Aristotelian soul, by contending that animals are bare material machines devoid of feeling or sentience, thus separating merely vital phenomena, which were to be given a purely mechanistic account, from the phenomena of mind. The sensory, intellectual, and volitional phenomena of mind required an immaterial soul – but one that did not govern the vital processes of the body. This Cartesian division was not completely victorious, and the relation between the vital and mental powers of organisms continued to be debated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the Aristotelian conception of the soul faded, psychology (the science of mind) separated from biology (the science of life). Michael Christoph Hanov used the term “biologia” to mark this distinction in his textbook on natural philosophy of 1766.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as Albrecht von Haller and Erasmus Darwin, continued the notion that the vital and sensitive powers are unitary.

Although Cartesian metaphysics posited an ontological divide between mind and body, eighteenth-century thinkers increasingly used subject matter rather than ontology to separate psychology from biology. The Aristotelian distinction between vegetative and cognitive powers (the latter comprising both sensory and intellectual powers) already provided a list of functions that might be deemed *mental*, irrespective of ontology: sense, appetite, guidance of motion, will, and intellect.

In the ongoing nineteenth-century debate over the relation between life and mind, vitalism initially retained currency among physiologists (such as J. Müller), who saw mental operations as manifestations of the vital power. The notion of

<sup>2</sup> Michael Christoph Hanov, *Philosophia naturalis sive physica dogmatica*, vol. 3 (Halle: Renger, 1766), 497–502.

a vital power gradually lost out to physical and chemical conceptions of life, and the Darwinian conception of the organism provided a new framework for regarding mind as a biological adaptation (again uniting biology and psychology). The German materialists (e.g., Vogt and Moleschott) and British physiologists (e.g., Maudsley) voiced a materialistic reductionism that viewed mind as an expression of purely corporeal activity. Others (e.g., Spencer, Lewes) viewed mind as a biological capacity not necessarily reducible to mechanical processes. Still others held that the phenomena of mind constitute a domain distinct from biological phenomena (Helmholtz, Wundt).<sup>3</sup>

### PSYCHOLOGY IN PHILOSOPHY

Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume investigated human mental capacities for knowledge in a broadly philosophical manner, while also invoking physiological or psychological notions. Especially in the eighteenth century, such investigations adopted what Locke<sup>4</sup> called “the plain, historical method”: they sought to provide a natural history of mental phenomena that would reveal the underlying causal structure of such phenomena. At a later period, the endeavor to use empirical study and causal analysis in epistemology became known as the *fallacy of psychologism*: the attempt to explain normative or epistemic claims by means of natural (and so presumably epistemically neutral) causal processes. But in the conceptual landscape of the early modern period, the charge of psychologism would have been baffling. Descartes and the rationalists (Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz) construed the faculties and powers of the mind as causally active knowing powers, and they conceived mental phenomena as instances of cognition, or as acts of knowing.<sup>5</sup> For example, they considered the faculty of intellect or understanding to be a power that was inherently truth-perceiving. No

<sup>3</sup> On vitalism, Timothy Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life: Teleology and Mechanics in Nineteenth-Century German Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). On scientific materialism, Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977). On the nonreductive positions of Spencer and Lewes, Gary Hatfield, “Psychology Old and New,” in *Cambridge History of Philosophy, 1870–1945*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 93–106; on Helmholtz and Wundt, Hatfield, *The Natural and the Normative: Theories of Spatial Perception from Kant to Helmholtz* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), chap. 5.

<sup>4</sup> John Locke, “Epistle to the Reader,” in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Basset, 1690).

<sup>5</sup> See Gary Hatfield, “Epistemology and Science in the Image of Modern Philosophy: Rorty on Descartes and Locke,” in *Future Pasts: Reflections on the History and Nature of Analytic Philosophy*, eds. Juliet Floyd and Sanford Shieh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 393–413, and “The Cognitive Faculties,” in *Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, eds. Michael Ayers and Daniel Garber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 953–1002; and David Owen, *Hume’s Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

“psychologistic” fallacy existed here, but rather an investigation of a presumptive noetic power. Any problem with the position would have concerned the existence of such a power, not the method of study. If such a power existed, it would be open to study and analysis as an active mental faculty.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the conviction grew that human cognitive powers are limited. Hume famously challenged rationalist powers of insight into the essences of things. He reduced belief about “matters of fact” to entrenched psychological habits, developed through associative mental processes. In Scotland, his work was widely debated, starting with an early response by Thomas Reid, professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow.<sup>6</sup> William Hamilton, professor of logic and metaphysics at Edinburgh, further developed Reid’s “common sense” response to Hume, emphasizing that our knowledge of external sensory objects is intuitive and direct and cannot properly be doubted.<sup>7</sup>

In France, Condillac carried on the spirit of a Lockean natural history of the mind, although with greater psychological thoroughness. He undertook an extensive thought-experiment, using the conceit of a statue that is brought to life.<sup>8</sup> Condillac has the statue gain one sense at a time, starting with smell, which allegedly is nonspatial; his aim was to build up thought compositionally, from least elements, without invoking mental faculties. The associative processes governing this construction are common to humans and other animals, but the human mind develops rational capacities as it acquires language. Condillac’s work inspired the French Ideologues including the physician Cabanis and the philosophers Destutt de Tracy and Maine de Biran. Cabanis attempted to reduce all thought, including willing, to passive sensations that arise in the nerves and brain (in his view, the brain “secretes” thought).<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Destutt de Tracy and Maine de Biran emphasized the role of the will in psychological development. Our sense of self and our relations to an external world arise from the muscle movements that we

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry in the Human Mind* (Edinburgh: Kinkaid & Bell, 1764) and *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh: Bell, 1785). In Scottish universities the professor of moral philosophy covered psychological topics from a “physical” point of view, meaning “naturalistically” (from the Greek root *physis*), not “materialistically”; see Gary Hatfield, “Remaking the Science of Mind: Psychology as a Natural Science,” in *Inventing Human Science*, eds. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 184–231, on 207–9.

<sup>7</sup> William Hamilton, *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*, eds. H. L. Mansel and John Veitch, 2 vols. (Boston: Gould & Lincoln, 1859), lecs. 15, 25. The professor of logic and metaphysics also might cover psychological topics.

<sup>8</sup> Etienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac, *A Treatise on the Sensations*, in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Franklin Philip and Harlan Lane (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis, *On the Relations between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, trans. Margaret Duggan Saidi, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 1:116–17.

voluntarily control and the resulting tactile sensations. Destutt de Tracy coined the term “ideology” to contrast with “psychology,” so as to avoid the connotation of the latter term as “the science of the soul.” He considered ideology to be a branch of zoology that studies the origin and development of ideas (sensations and feelings).<sup>10</sup>

Psychology had been on offer as a philosophical discipline in Germany from the time of Christian Wolff, and by the late eighteenth century it was thriving.<sup>11</sup> There were several tendencies. J. F. Abel, professor of psychology and morals at the Karlsschule during its period as a university, published a representative textbook in 1786.<sup>12</sup> After some methodological remarks, he considered the nature of the mind, its basic powers and organs, and its relation to the brain, and then he systematically surveyed the chief faculties of mind: sense, imagination, attention, thought, feeling, and bodily motion. This topical organization was similar to Wolff’s; indeed, with the exception of the comparatively new topic of attention, it could be traced back to the Aristotelian *De anima* tradition. Books on anthropology (*Menschenlehre*), such as that by J. K. Wezel, treated both physiological and psychological aspects of human beings.<sup>13</sup> (The focus in anthropology on national or racial comparisons was just emerging in the late eighteenth century.) Finally, a spate of psychology textbooks arose in the 1790s, several of which developed Kant’s attitude of avoiding dogmatic metaphysical claims. Abel had considered the nature of the soul to be fair game in empirical psychology but had excluded mind-body interaction. C. C. E. Schmid, citing Kant, excluded from psychology all talk of the substantial nature of the soul. However, Schmid did recognize a conceptual distinction between psychological and bodily phenomena. In his “empirical dualism,” psychology considers the topics traditionally associated with soul or mind and also maps the relations between psychological and bodily phenomena.<sup>14</sup> Abel, Schmid, and other philosophical psychologists in late eighteenth-century Germany insisted that the cognitive faculties of the mind can be studied empirically.

<sup>10</sup> Antoine Destutt de Tracy, *Éléments d'idéologie* (Paris: Courcier, 1817), xiii–xiv. Pierre Maine de Biran, *Influence of Habit on the Faculty of Thinking*, trans. Margaret Donaldson Boehm (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1929).

<sup>11</sup> Christian Wolff, *Psychologia empirica* (Frankfurt: Renger, 1738) and *Psychologia rationalis* (Frankfurt: Renger, 1740). Friedrich August Carus, *Geschichte der Psychologie* (Leipzig: Barth, 1808), surveyed the history of psychology from the Greeks to his time; he listed 125 eighteenth-century authors who contributed to psychology, mostly Germans.

<sup>12</sup> Jacob F. Abel, *Einleitung in die Seelenlehre* (Stuttgart: Mezler, 1786).

<sup>13</sup> Johann Karl Wezel, *Versuch ueber die Kenntniss des Menschen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Dykischen Buchhandlung, 1784–5).

<sup>14</sup> Carl C. E. Schmid, *Empirische Psychologie*, 2nd ed. (Jena: Cröker, 1796), 189–90. Also, Ludwig Jacob, *Grundriss der Erfahrungsseelenlehre* (Halle: Hemmerde & Schwetschke, 1791).

## A NATURAL SCIENCE OF THE SOUL

Alongside these developments stemming from mainstream philosophy, the rise of natural science engendered the call for a natural scientific (or natural philosophical, or “physical”) version of psychology. These were not reductionist efforts toward a materialistic psychology. Rather, they applied the new spirit of observation and causal analysis to the mind. Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), offered as “an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects” (the book’s subtitle), was an early example.<sup>15</sup> David Hartley’s *Observations on Man* (1749) developed the vibratory model of the nervous system that Newton’s *Principia* had broached in the seventeenth century. This physician-philosopher expounded an associationist theory of human knowledge and conduct, grounded in resonating nerve processes. Although not explicitly calling for a new psychology, Hartley’s work gave impetus to the natural philosophical approach to human thought and behavior.<sup>16</sup>

Just after midcentury, three works endeavored to establish an empirical and scientific psychology. In 1755, the French physician Guillaume-Lambert Godart published his *La physique de l’ame*.<sup>17</sup> Although his theoretical framework remained largely Aristotelian (a “rational soul” as a “vivifying principle” accounted for both life-functions and thought), his methodological attitude resembled the Newtonian spirit of empirical investigation. Forsaking the aim of knowing the nature of the soul, he sought instead to describe its characteristic activities and its dependencies on bodily organs. A year later, the German physician Johann Gottlob Krüger published his *Versuch einer Experimental-Seelenlehre* to show “how the soul can be known through experiment,” envisioning an experimental science of mind similar to the experimental science of body.<sup>18</sup> He reviewed the extant literature, collected descriptions of “natural experiments” in brain-damaged patients, and speculated about neural vibrations and their mathematical relations to sense experience. The Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet wrote several influential books. His first psychological work, the *Essai de psychologie*, appeared

<sup>15</sup> David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, 3 vols. (London: Noon, Longmans, 1739–40).

<sup>16</sup> David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (London: Richardson, 1749; French translation, *De l’homme, de ses facultés physiques et intellectuelles de ses devoirs, et de ses espérances* [Paris, 1802]). On vibratory nerve action, Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. I. B. Cohen and Anne Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), General Scholium, and Newton, *Opticks*, 4th ed. (London: Innys, 1730), Queries 12–14, 23–4.

<sup>17</sup> Guillaume-Lambert Godart, *La physique de l’ame humaine* (Berlin: Compagnie, 1755).

<sup>18</sup> Johann Gottlob Krüger, *Versuch einer Experimental-Seelenlehre* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1756), 1.



anonymously in 1754, followed by the *Essai analytique sur les facultés de l'ame* in 1760.<sup>19</sup> Bonnet's psychology shared many features of the new psychological naturalism: he accepted dualism and the immateriality of the soul, without claiming to have analyzed the nature of the soul; he posited vibrating nerve fibers and motions in nervous fluid as causes of mental states; and he held that all our ideas originate through the senses.

These natural philosophical approaches were influential. In Germany, the work of Krüger and Bonnet was incorporated in philosophical psychological works such as Schmid's, and Bonnet influenced the Ideologues in France. In Scotland, Joseph Priestley followed Hartley's path, and Erasmus Darwin drew upon the medical literature in offering a general analysis of "the laws of organic life." Under the title *Zoonomia* (1794–6), the elder Darwin (grandfather to Charles Darwin) devoted a good portion of his vitalistic analysis of the "animal economy" (the physiology of higher animals) to sense, motion, "the production of ideas," and instinct, in an associationist framework. Characteristic of the flow of ideas across linguistic boundaries, his work was immediately translated into German (1795–9, reissued in 1801 and 1805) and subsequently into Italian (1803–5) and French (1810–11).<sup>20</sup>

#### PSYCHOLOGY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY OPTICS

Psychological topics had been discussed in the optical literature since antiquity. In the eleventh century, the Islamic physician Ibn al-Haytham produced an influential work on optics that covered the psychology of visual perception in considerable depth. In the early modern period, Descartes and Berkeley published works on vision that covered both physiological and psychological factors.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Charles Bonnet, *Essai de psychologie; ou, considerations sur les operations de l'ame, sur l'habitude et sur l'education* (1754) (London, 1755; German translation, *Des Herrn Karl Bonnet Psychologischer Versuch als eine Einleitung zu seinen philosophischen Schriften* (Lemgo: Meyer 1773); *Essai analytique sur les facultés de l'ame*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Philibert, 1760; 2nd ed., Copenhagen, 1769; German translation, *Analytischer Versuch über die Seelenkräfte* (Bremen: Cramer, 1770; Dutch, Utrecht, 1771). New psychological material appeared in his masterpiece, *La palingénésie philosophique ou idées sur l'état passé & l'état futur des etres vivans*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Philibert & Chirol, 1769; German translation, *Herrn C. Bonnets Philosophische Palingenesie, oder, Gedanken über den vergangenen und künftigen Zustand lebender Wesen* (Zurich: Orell, Gessner, Füßli, 1769–70). On Godart, Krüger, and Bonnet, see Hatfield, "Remaking the Science of Mind," 201–7.

<sup>20</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or, The Laws of Organic Life*, 2 vols. (London: Johnson, 1794–6), with frequent reprintings and translations, on which see Thom Verhave's preface to the reprint edition (New York: AMS Press, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn al-Haytham, *The Optics of Ibn al-Haytham: Books I–III, On Direct Vision*, ed. and trans. A. I. Sabra, 2 vols. (London: Warburg Institute, 1989), originally written in Arabic ca. 1030. George Berkeley, *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (Dublin: Pepyat, 1709). On Descartes, Berkeley, and al-Haytham (also known as Alhazen), see Gary Hatfield and William

The optical literature offered a geometrical analysis of the factors underlying perception of size and distance, including lines of sight, visual angle subtended, and the interaction between perceived size and perceived distance. As regards perceived size, a commonly accepted theory (found in Ptolemy, al-Haytham, and Descartes) held that, of two objects subtending the same visual angle, if one is perceived as being farther away, it will appear larger. Proponents explained this fact by positing an unnoticed act of judgment, which, by taking distance into account, yields a perceived size that varies with perceived distance. The well-known Moon illusion, in which the horizon Moon appears larger than the Moon directly overhead, can be explained using this theory of size perception, assuming that we perceive the horizon Moon as being farther away. During the eighteenth century, the optical writer Robert Smith subjected this theory to experimental test. He postulated that the perceived distance of the Moon varies with that of the vault of the heavens, and that we perceive this vault as a flattened dome (as opposed to a true hemisphere). He confirmed his hypothesis by comparing the perceived elevation of various stars with their known positions.<sup>22</sup> More generally, the eighteenth century saw increasing application of mathematical structures to visual phenomena, including visual acuity, the appearance of architectural lines from a given viewing station, and quantitative studies of the duration of visual sensations, which were computed by swinging a live coal in a circle against the dark and noting the least velocity needed to induce the appearance of a closed circle.<sup>23</sup>

The senses were widely discussed in mainstream philosophical literatures. Berkeley's *New Theory of Vision* sparked a debate on whether the visual perception of size and distance depends on prior experience and association, as he contended, or is innate. Condillac, Hartley, Reid, and others engaged this debate.<sup>24</sup> Within medicine, surveys of human physiology standardly addressed psychological topics, focusing especially on the functioning of the senses. More specialized medical tracts, such as Porterfield's *Treatise on the Eye, the Manner and Phenomena of Vision* (1759), dealt thoroughly with the psychology of visual perception, in addition to anatomy, physiology, and pathology. Priestley's monumental 1772 survey

Epstein, "The Sensory Core and the Medieval Foundations of Early Modern Perceptual Theory," *Isis* 70 (1979): 363–84, and Hatfield, "Perception as Unconscious Inference," in *Perception and the Physical World: Psychological and Philosophical Issues in Perception*, eds. Dieter Heyer and Rainer Mausfeld (New York: Wiley, 2002), 115–43.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Smith, *Compleat System of Opticks*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Crownfield, 1738), 1:63–6.

<sup>23</sup> Described in Joseph Priestley, *History and Present State of Discoveries Relating to Vision, Light, and Colours* (London: Johnson, 1772; German translation, Leipzig, 1775–6); also, Hatfield, "Remaking the Science of Mind," 215–16.

<sup>24</sup> See Nicholas Pastore, *Selective History of Theories of Visual Perception: 1650–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), chaps. 5–7, and Hatfield, *Natural and Normative*, chap. 2.

of “discoveries relating to vision, light, and colors” drew on works in physics, physiology, and philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the eighteenth century, psychological topics were widely discussed, but the place of psychology in the organization of knowledge was not fixed. In philosophy, the extent to which psychology could serve to ground epistemology was under dispute and remained so throughout the nineteenth century.

#### EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY RESPONSES TO KANT

Kant’s critical philosophy freely used psychological language. He spoke of the “faculties” of sense, understanding, and reason; of the “synthesis” of representations; of the “affinity” of representations for association or unification. His faculty-talk had roots in philosophical analyses of human knowledge that harked back to rationalism, and in empirically oriented psychological analyses such as those by Wolff or J. N. Tetens.<sup>26</sup> Kant himself was clear that empirical psychology, as a “physiology of inner sense” (a naturalistic description of mental phenomena), could have no implications for either general logic (as a theory of knowledge) or his own peculiar “transcendental logic” (the transcendental analysis of the conditions of knowledge).<sup>27</sup>

Subsequent authors disputed Kant’s claims to have avoided a psychological foundation for his transcendental philosophy. Fichte and Hegel characterized Kant’s philosophy as resting on introspective or psychological grounds. J. F. Fries (professor of philosophy at Heidelberg and Jena) proposed a psychological version of Kant’s critical philosophy,<sup>28</sup> contending approvingly that Kant’s philosophical conclusions were founded on a psychological method. He criticized Kant for not recognizing the true basis for his claims about, for instance, the

<sup>25</sup> Albrecht von Haller, *Elementa physiologiae corporis humani*, 8 vols. (Lausanne: Bousquet; Leyden: Haak, 1757–66). William Porterfield, *Treatise on the Eye, the Manner and Phaenomena of Vision*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Miller, 1759), and Priestley, *Vision, Light, and Colours*.

<sup>26</sup> Johann Nicholas Tetens, *Philosophische Versuch über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Weidmannns, 1777).

<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A54/B78, A347/B405–6. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie Ausgabe (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1900–) [henceforth Kant, Ak], vols. 3–4.

<sup>28</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Second Introduction; German original in *Fichtes Sammtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 1:471–9. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simpson, 3 vols. (London: Humanities, 1892), 3:432, 443; German original in *Werke: Theorieerkaufgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970–), 20:339, 351. Jakob Friedrich Fries, *Neue oder anthropologische Kritik der Vernunft*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1828–31), 1:20–30, 2:48–72. See Hatfield, *Natural and Normative*, chap. 4.

unity of apperception. Fries did not claim to detect such a unity by introspection, but he offered an “empirical” justification for its postulation by showing how it would explain various cognitive “facts.” These facts were epistemic in nature: the existence of universally valid claims in mathematics and physics, or of a unitary world of experience. Fries treated these facts as empirical because his explanations of them were analogous to explanations in natural science: he posited a causal process of synthesis as underlying all cognition. Further, he drew these facts from his own consciousness, by contrast with Kant’s appeal to a “consciousness in general.”<sup>29</sup>

The philosopher J. F. Herbart, who in 1809 assumed Kant’s chair in Königsberg, also charged that Kant had grounded his philosophy on psychology. Unlike Fries, Herbart considered such a grounding illegitimate. He was not unsympathetic to psychology, which he himself sought to develop as a natural science, but he differed from Fries on the relative priority of philosophical and psychological methods.

Herbart regarded philosophy and metaphysics as prior to psychology. He held that the method of philosophy is the analysis of concepts. Such analysis includes reflection on experience and the concepts that we use to cognize experience. It is less an empirical investigation than a critical and analytical reflection through which philosophy offers a metaphysical analysis of the objects of cognition, including an ontology of such objects. On this basis, Herbart claimed to establish that reality consists in monad-like entities, which, unlike genuine Leibnizian monads, causally interact. He further argued that our experience initially is of isolated, nonspatial qualities. We acquire the ability for spatial experience as a result of causal interactions among simple qualitative representations; as these representations compete to enter consciousness, they force themselves into relations of “next-to-ness,” thereby fusing into a spatial structure. Herbart described the psychological processes involved as associative. Rejecting all psychological faculties or powers except the power of representation (or presentation: the experiencing of a quality), he sought to account for all mental structures on the basis of experience. He articulated an extensive mathematical model of the dynamical interactions among presentations. A Herbartian school maintained his emphasis on psychogenesis, minus the mathematical constructions, throughout the nineteenth century. T. Waitz and W. F. Volkmann were prominent.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Gary Hatfield, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 [marginal pagination as in Ak]), Ak 4:300.

<sup>30</sup> Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Allgemeine Metaphysik* (Königsberg: Unzer, 1828–9), and *Psychologie als Wissenschaft neu gegründet auf Erfahrung, Metaphysik und Mathematik* (Königsberg: Unzer, 1824–25). Theodor Waitz, *Lehrbuch der Psychologie als Naturwissenschaft* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1849), and *Introduction to Anthropology*, trans. J. F. Collingwood (London: Longmans,

F. E. Beneke, who taught philosophy and psychology at Berlin, defended the view that philosophy must have an empirical basis in psychology. He rejected Herbart's priority of metaphysics over psychology and claimed to be going "back to Kant" – restoring the primacy of the theory of knowledge in philosophy. In fact, he moved further away from Kant than had Fries, rejecting all postulated a priori structures. For him, natural scientific psychology would ground philosophy. That psychology would rest on the same factual basis as natural science. Despite his differences from Herbart, Beneke's account of the associative or "fusional" interaction of elemental sensations was Herbartian.<sup>31</sup>

Subsequent philosophers disputed such claims to place the theory of knowledge on a psychological foundation. Lotze, whose own contributions to sensory physiology and psychology were well known, argued that no psychological theory could adequately capture the normative force of thought. He thus denied that psychological theories of space could account for the necessary and universal demonstrations of geometry.<sup>32</sup> The historian of philosophy J. E. Erdmann coined the term "psychologism" to describe the interpretations of Kant by Fries and Beneke; the term subsequently took on a negative connotation. F. A. Lange, whose *History of Materialism* was rivaled in popularity among philosophical works of the 1870s only by Lotze's writings, rejected a psychological basis for the theory of knowledge. The neo-Kantian H. Cohen argued that Kant's philosophy was more basic than psychology and therefore could not be founded upon psychology.<sup>33</sup>

#### EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY SENSORY PHYSIOLOGY

The nineteenth century was a golden age of sensory physiology, both theoretically and experimentally. E. H. Weber, Fechner, Helmholtz, and Wundt greatly extended the observation and measurement of sensory phenomena, especially in optics and acoustics. Theoretically, the previously attempted associationist derivations of spatial perception from nonspatial sensations were deepened by new reference to the feelings that accompany muscle movements.

1863). Wilhelm Fridolin Volkmann, *Grundriss der Psychologie* (Halle: Fricke, 1856). By contrast, Moritz Wilhelm Drobisch continued Herbart's mathematical treatment of an underlying psychical mechanics, *Erste Grundlehren der mathematischen Psychologie* (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1850).

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Eduard Beneke, *Kant und die philosophische Aufgabe unserer Zeit* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler, 1832), and *Die neue Psychologie* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler, 1845).

<sup>32</sup> Hermann Lotze, *Logic*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), 509–17; see Hatfield, *Natural and Normative*, 163–4.

<sup>33</sup> Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1870), 2:636. Friedrich A. Lange, *History of Materialism*, trans. E. C. Thomas, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), bk. 2, sec. 3, chap. 4. Hermann Cohen, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1871). On psychologism, see Lanier Anderson, "Neo-Kantianism and the Roots of Anti-Psychologism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13 (2005): 287–323.

In Germany, theoretical analyses of spatial perception were stimulated by Kant's claim in the first *Critique* that space and time are a priori forms of intuition. The German sensory physiologists J. G. Steinbuch and C. T. Tourtual interpreted this claim as describing innate structures in sense perception, thus construing Kant's claim as psychological or physiological, and hence as subject to refutation or confirmation through empirical study. Steinbuch argued against Kant that both the bare ability for spatial representation and the sensory ability to localize objects spatially are acquired through interactions between sensations and feelings of muscle innervation. Tourtual, by contrast, argued for an innate ability for spatial representation and for innate laws for localizing sensations within space. Both regarded the ability for spatial representation as an adaptation (acquired or innate) of the mind to the spatiality of the environment.

Tourtual and Steinbuch conceived the ability to localize sensations in space as a kind of mapping problem. In the case of vision, it concerns how we locate sensations in visual space upon stimulation of the retina. For Steinbuch and Tourtual, there are two stages: first, creation of a two-dimensional representation that mirrors the pattern of light on the retina; then, construction of a three-dimensional representation that presents the world-in-depth of everyday visual experience. Nearly all early modern theorists held that sheerly through our physiology, our visual sensations are originally two-dimensional. Although Steinbuch and Tourtual were on opposite sides of the nativism issue, both required a psychological explanation of two-dimensional representation. Their shared position set an agenda for mid-nineteenth-century theorists: to explain how the two-dimensional representation is produced.<sup>34</sup>

Steinbuch and Tourtual both rejected Kant's transcendental idealism. For Steinbuch, a world of real, spatially extended objects was needed as the causal basis through which our sensory spatial capacities develop. An idealist might reply that, granting Steinbuch's account of the psychogenesis of spatial representation, he cannot show that the representations must copy, or accurately portray, their causal basis. Tourtual did not attempt to refute Kant's transcendental idealism: he simply presupposed a scientific realism about things and their spatial properties.

A third sensory physiologist, Johannes Müller, was philosophically more penetrating than these authors, if less creative concerning the theory of spatial vision. Müller was the preeminent German physiologist in the 1830s and 1840s. After moving from Bonn to Berlin in 1833, he trained a new generation of scientific

<sup>34</sup> Johann Georg Steinbuch, *Beytrag zur Physiologie der Sinne* (Nurnberg: Schrag, 1811). Caspar Theobald Tourtual, *Die Sinne des Menschen* (Münster: Regensburg, 1827). Helmholtz rejected the need for a two-dimensional stage; see Hatfield, *Natural and Normative*, 137, 149, 159–60, 177.

physiologists, who included Helmholtz, Emil du Bois-Reymond, Ernst Brücke, and Carl Ludwig.

Within sensory physiology, Müller is known for the law of specific nerve energies, a doctrine that others, including Descartes, had held, but that he articulated with great care. Müller assigned to each type of sensory nerve (or to its terminus in the brain) the capacity to produce only a restricted range of perceptions: the optic nerves yield light, color, and darkness; the auditory nerve, sounds; the olfactory nerves, odors; and so on. The same causal factor can produce any of the different perceptions: electrical stimulation of the retina or optic nerve produces a perception of color; the same stimulus yields a perception of sound when applied to the auditory nerve. He held that the immediate objects of such perceptions “are merely particular states induced in the nerves, and felt as sensation either by the nerves themselves or by the sensorium.”<sup>35</sup> To that extent, our sensory perceptions are subjective: they pertain directly to the state of our own nervous system. Nonetheless, he also held that because the nerves physically interact with stimuli in regular ways, they “make known to the sensorium, by virtue of the changes thus produced in them by external causes, not merely their own condition, but also the properties and changes of condition of external bodies.”<sup>36</sup> Mid-twentieth-century philosophers would have called Müller an *indirect realist*. He thinks that external bodies, in virtue of their physical properties, cause sensations in our nerves, which stand in a regular relation to external properties and so are informative of them, without necessarily revealing the physical character of the cause. For example, color sensation gives no hint that light is a vibration, nor (in later terms) that it behaves as both a wave and a particle.

Among some of Müller’s contemporaries and in the literature of the history of psychology, the doctrine of specific nerve energies was assimilated to the Kantian doctrine of a priori forms of intuition. This comparison, which treats the qualitative aspect of color sensations that depend on the nervous system of the experiencing subject as an innate “form” of sense perception, is misleading. The two authors had fundamentally different views. Kant held that sensations such as color are wholly subjective, while Müller held that such sensations are informative of their normal physical causes. Further, Kant regarded space as an a priori and “ideal” form of intuition, whereas, according to Müller, spatial sensations arise because the nerves feel their own spatial extension: the spatiality of sensation is based in the spatiality of the nerves in themselves. Moreover, Müller

<sup>35</sup> Johannes Müller, *Elements of Physiology*, trans. William Baly, 2 vols. (London: Taylor & Walton, 1838–42), 1:1073. On Descartes’s version of specific nerve energies, Hatfield, “Descartes’ Naturalism about the Mental,” in *Descartes’ Natural Philosophy*, eds. Stephen Gaukroger, John Schuster, and John Sutton (London: Routledge, 2000), 630–58.

<sup>36</sup> Müller, *Elements of Physiology*, 1:1073.

was a kind of Herbartian realist: he held that sense perceptions inform us of a spatially extended, real external world. He contrasted his position with empiricism, rationalism, and transcendental idealism, all three. Contrary to rationalism, we gain knowledge of the properties of external things through a process of abstraction, which fails to generate absolute knowledge of the essences of things in themselves (whether mind or matter); to this extent, Müller agreed with Kant's criticism of traditional metaphysics. But he held, contrary to empiricism and to transcendental idealism, that we can attain a limited knowledge of things in themselves, including the discovery of adequate (i.e., true) explanatory principles regarding mind and nature.<sup>37</sup>

### QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT IN SENSATION AND PERCEPTION

In 1784, Kant famously asserted the impossibility of applying quantitative measures to psychological phenomena. He paired this assertion with the conclusion that psychology could, therefore, never become a science. Much has been made of this conclusion and its refutation by nineteenth-century psychophysics. Kant's conclusion must be assessed against the strict definition of "science" that he employed: any "scientific" subject area must afford a priori application of mathematics within its domain. He argued that the phenomena of "inner sense" unfold in only a single dimension, time, and so those phenomena cannot sustain synthetic a priori constructions of the kind he himself had developed for Newtonian mechanics.<sup>38</sup> In the first *Critique* Kant claimed that the "axioms of intuition" establish that all intuitions are "extensive magnitudes"<sup>39</sup> and that the "anticipations of perception" establish that all sensations have "intensive magnitude," that is, degree.<sup>40</sup> Presumably, these a priori principles do not reach the criterion of science because they do not ground laws governing the values of these magnitudes. However, if we leave aside Kant's idiosyncratic requirement that "science" requires a priori laws, the question of the possibility of a quantitative psychology of perception turns on our ability to measure the extensive or intensive magnitudes of perception.

Since antiquity, optics has used geometrical structures to describe extensive magnitudes in spatial perception, such as size and distance; quantitative

<sup>37</sup> Müller, *Elements of Physiology*, bk. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans. Michael Friedman, in *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, eds. Henry Allison and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Ak 4:469–72.

<sup>39</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A162, B202.

<sup>40</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A166, B207.



experiments concerning these magnitudes were not uncommon in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, Krüger, in his medical textbook, the *Naturlehre*, provided a new framework for relating sensations to the intensity of the stimulus. Classical optical theory held that sensations vary directly with the intensity of the stimulus. Krüger maintained that a third factor is needed: the varying states of nerve fibers. He called this factor “tension” and suggested that the intensity of sensation is equal to the product of stimulus intensity and tension.<sup>41</sup> Krüger’s framework, which remained merely theoretical, suggests that individual differences in psychophysical relations might be found among observers or for the same observer on different occasions.

The theory and practice of measuring sensations and perceptions developed greatly in the mid-nineteenth century; measurements of spatial representations were refined, and new quantitative measurements were devised for sensory qualities and intensities. E. H. Weber measured spatial acuity by finding the smallest “just noticeable difference” (jnd) that a given subject could discriminate when comparing successively presented line segments. The most acute subjects could detect differences between lines having a ratio of 100:101 (a jnd of 1/100), while the less acute could detect a jnd of only 1/50 or 1/25.<sup>42</sup>

Weber also applied his jnd method to intensities and qualities in perception, asking subjects to compare different weights and to judge the smallest perceptible differences between the pitches of tones (among other tasks). Reviewing Weber’s work, Fechner formulated “Weber’s law,” according to which the proportional relations between stimuli needed to produce a jnd are constant (where  $R$  is the *Reiz*, or physical stimulus,  $\Delta R/R = \text{constant}$ , for the jnd). In other words, the stimulus differences between just discriminable pitches are not constant intervals but vary in proportion to the frequency of the sound. In absolute terms, lower frequencies are less discriminable than higher frequencies, but in relative terms, lower frequencies must be increased by the same *proportion* as higher frequencies in order to produce a jnd. With weights, there is no constant difference (for example, 1 gram) that defines the least discriminable difference. Heavier objects require a greater absolute difference in weight for subjects to discriminate them, but the proportion is constant. We might just discriminate a 4.0-gram from a 3.9-gram weight (absolute difference, 0.1 gram), but be unable to discriminate a 39.9-gram weight from a 40.0-gram weight (absolute difference, 0.1 gram). We should be able just to discriminate a 39-gram weight from a 40-gram weight, because

<sup>41</sup> Johann Gottlob Krüger, *Naturlehre*, 3 vols. (Halle: Hemmerde, 1740–9), 2:567–80; he expressed the relation as  $S:s = V:T:vt$  (where  $S$  and  $s$  are sensation intensities,  $V$  and  $v$  are stimulus intensities, and  $T$  and  $t$  are neural tensions).

<sup>42</sup> E. H. Weber, *On the Tactile Senses*, trans. Helen E. Ross and David J. Murray, 2nd ed. (Hove: Taylor & Francis, 1996; Latin original 1834, German original 1846).

the proportion 39/40 is preserved. Fechner extended Weber's law into Fechner's law by assuming that each jnd differs in quality or intensity by the same amount as any other jnd and by assigning a value of 1 unit to any physical stimulus at the threshold of detection. Fechner's law states that the magnitude of sensation ( $S$ ) is equal to the logarithm of the stimulus times a constant ( $S = k \log R$ ).<sup>43</sup>

Fechner was deeply interested in the metaphysics of mind. He saw everything as having "inner" (mental) and "outer" (physical) characteristics, a version of panpsychism. His dual-aspect monism entails a strict parallelism between mental and physical phenomena. He wanted to measure the soul itself, using "inner psychophysics," a psychophysiological relation between nerve states and sensations.<sup>44</sup> An inner psychophysics requires assumptions about the characteristics of nerve processes, similar to Krüger's. Without instruments to measure nerve and brain processes directly, however, Fechner's actual measurements pertained only to the sensory discrimination of stimuli: judgments of sameness or difference between external stimuli as perceived.

Weber's and Fechner's work spurred an immediate increase in quantitative work on sensation and perception, facilitating the declaration of a "new psychology" based more firmly on quantitative experimental methods. The new methodological attitudes exemplified Schmid's "empirical dualism," according to which relations between mind and body can be studied empirically without previously settling the metaphysics of the soul or of mind-body interaction. Weber's studies of sensory acuity had a further influence on the theoretical landscape, by reinforcing a specific conception of the relation between nerve fibers and sensations: each fiber gives rise to a single sensation. Weber and others held that each sensation enters the domain of the psychological independently of other sensations, even if adult observers do not experience these elementary sensations in isolation. Later theorists, including Helmholtz and the young Wundt, adopted the one-fiber, one-sensation view, describing as "unconscious" these isolated sensations and the psychological processes that synthesize them.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Gustav Fechner, *Elements of Psychophysics: Volume 1*, trans. H. E. Adler (New York: Holt, 1966; German original, 1860), chaps. 9–10; Michael Heidelberger, *Nature from Within: Gustav Theodor Fechner and His Psychophysical Worldview*, trans. C. Kloor (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), chap. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Fechner, *Elements of Psychophysics*, 9–13; Eckart Scheerer, "Fechner's Inner Psychophysics: Its Historical Fate and Present Status," in *Cognition and Psychophysics: Basic Issues*, eds. Hans-Georg Geissler, Stephen W. Link, and James T. Townsend (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1992), 3–21. Also, Georg Elias Müller (Lotze's student), *Zur Grundlegung der Psychophysik* (Berlin: Grieben, 1878), and "Zur Psychophysik der Gesichtsempfindungen," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* 10 (1896): 1–82, 321–413.

<sup>45</sup> Hermann von Helmholtz, "Recent Progress in the Theory of Vision," in his *Selected Writings*, trans. Russell Kahl (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 144–222, on 166–8 (German original, 1868). Wilhelm Wundt, *Beiträge zur Theorie der Sinneswahrnehmung* (Leipzig: Winter, 1862), 52–9.

During the 1860s and 1870s, intensive work in sensory physiology and psychology was undertaken, especially on the visual perception of color and of spatial properties. Wundt, Helmholtz, and Ewald Hering wrote extensively on spatial perception, the first two from an “empiristic” viewpoint (that spatial perception is an acquired ability), the latter from a “nativist” perspective (that spatial localization is largely determined by innate mechanisms, with minor tuning by experience).<sup>46</sup>

Helmholtz and Hering contributed major studies of color vision.<sup>47</sup> Early in the century, Thomas Young had proposed that the human eye contains three types of color receptors, each maximally sensitive to a different region of the visible spectrum. Hermann Grassmann, Maxwell, and Helmholtz refined this theory to provide a precise mapping between wavelengths of physical light and experienced visual qualities. They thus showed that qualitative experiences could be studied empirically with precise results. Their results were psychophysical, entailing no particular brain mechanism to mediate between the three-receptor system in the eye and the experience of color. Helmholtz postulated a simple psychophysiological relation between receptors and color sensations, his one-fiber, one-sensation hypothesis using red, green, and violet sensations as primary colors. Conscious color perception was the result of unconscious psychological operations (including mixture) on these elemental sensations.

Hering attributed a greater role to physiological mechanisms in color perception. His “opponent process” hypothesis postulated four physiologically primitive color responses that act as “yoked” opposites: a red-green system and a blue-yellow system. A physiological process yielding a perception of red if stimulated in one direction would yield green if stimulated oppositely; this system could allow either red or green but no phenomenal mixture of the two. Similarly, the blue-yellow system may yield one or the other but not a mixture of both. Later theorists combined the Young-Helmholtz three-receptor view (which had strong empirical support) with the Hering opponent-process view. The resultant theory, which became widely accepted in the second half of the twentieth century, is the basis for the claim that human perceivers are physiologically unable to experience a greenish red or a reddish green.

#### BRITISH DEVELOPMENTS

In Scotland, Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, William Hamilton, Alexander Bain, and James Mill (who was educated in Scotland but wrote his psychological

<sup>46</sup> Hatfield, *Natural and Normative*, chap. 5; R. S. Turner, *In the Eye's Mind: Vision and the Helmholtz-Hering Controversy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), chaps. 3–5, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Turner, *Eye's Mind*, chaps. 6–7, 10–11, 14.

works in London) contributed to psychological thought. Stewart and Hamilton were followers of Reid, opposing Hume's analytical empiricism regarding knowledge of an external world.<sup>48</sup> Besides Reid's "common sense" account of the apprehension of causal relations, they advocated his view that we directly perceive the external world. To them, there is no "veil of perception" such as they alleged Locke and Hume to have interposed between perceiver and perceived. Brown, by contrast, maintained the analytical empiricism of Condillac, proposing an especially thorough associationist psychology, albeit one that was conjoined to a Reidian argument for the existence of an immaterial mind as the vessel within which associations occur. Educated as a physician, Brown emphasized the extent to which muscular feelings underlie our experience of an external world and its spatiality, a Scottish counterpart to Steinbuch's muscle-feeling theory. His lectures at Edinburgh on associationist psychology were published on his death in 1820.<sup>49</sup>

James Mill published an equally thorough associationist analysis of the human mind in 1829. John Stuart Mill endorsed his father's associationism in republishing this work with his notes in 1869. At Aberdeen, Bain retained an associationist framework while forging a stronger relationship between physiology and psychology than Brown.<sup>50</sup>

Two further currents arose in British psychology after midcentury. First, Spencer and then George Henry Lewes developed a biological psychology, according to which mind is a biological adaptation that adjusts organisms to their environment through on-the-spot responses to novel situations. Second, the physiologists Carpenter and Maudsley embraced psychological topics in their accounts of brain function. Both argued that brain processes are properly described as psychological even when they are unconscious. Carpenter, a dualist regarding conscious mental activity, called these physiological processes "unconscious cerebration." Maudsley, a materialistic monist, vigorously attacked introspection as a method in psychology (following Comte's and J. S. Mill's lead) and promoted "objective" methods: physiological measures, cross-species comparisons, and child developmental studies.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, in *Collected Works*, ed. Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh: Constable, 1854–60), vols. 2–4. Hamilton, *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1820).

<sup>50</sup> James Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, 2 vols. (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1829); new ed., ed. J. S. Mill (London: Longmans, 1869). Alexander Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect* (London: Parker, 1855).

<sup>51</sup> William Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology*, 6th ed. (London: Kegan & Paul, 1881), chap. 13. Henry Maudsley, *Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1867), chap. 1.

## PSYCHOLOGY, OLD AND NEW

The new experimental psychology of mental phenomena arose out of the quantitative work of Weber, Fechner, Helmholtz, Wundt, and others, at laboratories that Wundt and G. E. Müller ran in Germany and that their students rapidly founded in North America during the 1890s. By the 1920s, this psychology was emblematic of scientific psychology, even as behaviorism was on the rise. In North America, the old philosophical psychology was quickly displaced by separate appointments of experimentalists to newly founded graduate psychology departments. In England and Germany, philosophical psychology continued into the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup>

The original founders of experimental psychology, including Wundt, although declaring psychology to be an independent discipline, were not eager to sever ties with philosophy. In his 1862 lectures, Wundt saw psychology as a natural science, but by 1874 he changed his mind; his *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* presented psychology as an autonomous discipline that sometimes uses methods from natural science (such as sensory physiology) in its studies of mental phenomena.<sup>53</sup> For studying higher cognition, which he saw as expressing historically and culturally conditioned ideas, Wundt turned from experimental to “ethnographic” methods. In psychology, humanistic methods complemented the methods of natural science. He considered philosophy to be the “general science” that reflects on the methods and concepts of all sciences, including psychology, but also as sharing with psychology an interest in the mind.<sup>54</sup>

Within experimental psychology proper, Wundt championed the use of introspection, a method that had long been under attack. In 1874, Franz Brentano published a book to help establish an empirical (though not quantitative) psychology, founded on phenomenological reflection. Brentano accepted the criticisms of Comte and Mill, that direct introspection (intent observation) of current psychological states is impossible, since the directed attention needed for observation would interrupt the mental states or processes under scrutiny. With Mill, he endorsed retrospection as the primary method of psychology: one must

<sup>52</sup> Ernest Hilgard, *Psychology in America: A Historical Survey* (San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), chaps. 1–2. Hatfield, “Wundt and Psychology as Science: Disciplinary Transformations,” *Perspectives on Science* 5 (1997): 349–82, and “Psychology Old and New.”

<sup>53</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Vorlesungen über die Menschen- und Thierseele*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Voss, 1863), 1:iv. Wundt, *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1874), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Logik*, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Enke, 1906–8), 1:7. Wundt, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 8th ed. (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1920), 18. Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology*, trans. E. L. Schaub (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

record just previous psychological states and processes after they have occurred but while they are still fresh in memory.<sup>55</sup>

At first Wundt accepted this criticism of introspection. He soon reversed himself.<sup>56</sup> He noted that when experimenters ask subjects to compare two tones or to classify a color, they do not ask them to attend to a special, fleeting, “inner” object. Rather, subjects are directed to attend to their experience of an outer, or physical, object (the tone or color). In comparing two color patches in the “matching” experiments that were frequently conducted then (and still are), we can fixate on the patches and adjust the color mixture until we achieve the intended match. We are not straining to look within, not abandoning the outer world for something inside; rather, we are attending to some particular aspect or dimension of our current visual experience. As the British phenomenological psychologist G. F. Stout remarked, in experiments based on introspection we do not ask subjects, “What process do you, by introspection, find to be going on in your mind?” but rather, “What do you see?”<sup>57</sup>

The introspective techniques of the late nineteenth century are not subject to the easy dismissal they often received in the late twentieth century. All the same, early experimental psychologists disagreed over specific methods. E. B. Titchener, a prominent American psychologist who studied with Wundt, advocated “systematic introspection,” in which trained observers report on qualitative aspects of higher cognitive processes. Such introspection was roundly criticized by subsequent psychologists, including the Gestalt psychologists W. Köhler and K. Koffka, who also rejected the theoretical drive toward “elements” common to Helmholtz, Wundt, and Titchener.<sup>58</sup> The Gestalt psychologists were heirs to the phenomenological methods originating in Brentano and carried on (psychologically) by his student Carl Stumpf. They described “immediate experience” but would have rejected any suggestion that they could do so only retrospectively.

Philosophy and psychology interacted intensely at the turn of the twentieth century: in German (Wundt, Natorp) or British (Ward, Russell) philosophical psychology, in contributions that philosophers (James, Dewey) made to the new psychology, in debates surrounding the rise of behaviorism, and in turf battles

<sup>55</sup> Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, ed. Linda L. McAlister (London: Routledge, 1973), 29–36.

<sup>56</sup> Respectively: Wilhelm Wundt, “Die Aufgaben der experimentellen Psychologie,” in *Unsere Zeit* (1882), as reprinted in his *Essays* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1885), 127–53, on 136–7; vs. Wundt, “Selbstbeobachtung und innere Wahrnehmung,” *Philosophische Studien* 4 (1888): 292–309; and Wundt, *Outlines of Psychology*, trans. C. H. Judd (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1902), 2–11.

<sup>57</sup> George F. Stout, *Analytic Psychology*, 2 vols. (London: Sonnenschein, 1896), 1:12.

<sup>58</sup> E. B. Titchener, “Prolegomena to a Study of Introspection,” *American Journal of Psychology* 23 (1912): 427–48. Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935). Wolfgang Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology* (New York: Liveright, 1929).

that led to charges of “psychologism.”<sup>59</sup> The epistemological problem of justifying our knowledge of an “external world” was ceded to philosophy, and epistemologists distanced themselves from psychology. This new antipathy between philosophy and psychology was sometimes read back from the later twentieth century into the nineteenth, distorting the actual relations, which were many, varied, and longstanding.

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<sup>59</sup> On turf battles, Martin Kusch, *Psychologism* (London: Routledge, 1995); Anderson, “Neo-Kantianism and Anti-Psychologism.” On early twentieth-century relations, Hatfield, “Behaviorism and Naturalism,” in *Cambridge History of Philosophy, 1870–1945*, 640–8. Paul Natorp, *Allgemeine Psychologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1912).

## LANGUAGE

MICHAEL N. FORSTER

This chapter focuses on nineteenth-century philosophy of language, conceived broadly in chronology but more narrowly in theme (for the most part, developments that occurred in such closely related fields as linguistics and formal logic have been bracketed out).

Nineteenth-century philosophy of language emerged from the background of a revolution in thinking about the subject that had taken place in eighteenth-century Germany, overturning standard Enlightenment preconceptions. Herder (1744–1803) and to a lesser extent Hamann (1730–88) were the main protagonists of this revolution.<sup>1</sup> Among the revolutionary principles they championed, the following are most important:

- (1) Thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language – that is, one can only think if one has a language, and one can only think what one can express linguistically. (Let us call this the *thought-language principle*.)
- (2) Meanings or concepts consist, not in the sorts of items, in principle independent of language, with which much of the philosophical tradition has equated them – for example, referents, Platonic forms, or the mental “ideas” favored by the British Empiricists and others – but in word-usages. (Let us call this the *meaning-usage principle*.)
- (3) Meanings or concepts are of their very nature based in (perceptual and affective) sensations – though this grounding can involve metaphorical extensions, and in the case of human beings a converse dependence (of sensations on concepts) holds as well. (Let us call this the *meaning-sensation principle*.)
- (4) Reference to particulars is never direct but is always mediated by general concepts, or “universals.” (Let us call this the *principle of indirect reference*.)
- (5) Mankind exhibits deep linguistic and conceptual-intellectual diversities, especially between different historical periods and cultures, but even to some extent

<sup>1</sup> I am here presupposing an assessment of their relative importance for which I have argued elsewhere. See my “Herder’s Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation: Three Fundamental Principles” (2002).

I would like to thank Susan Hahn, Hans Sluga, and Allen Wood for insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article that helped me to improve it.



- between individuals living within a single period and culture. (Let us call this the *diversity principle*.)
- (6) Language – and hence also thought, human mental life more generally, and indeed the very self – is fundamentally social in nature. (Let us call this the *language-sociality principle*.)
  - (7) Metaphysical philosophy is largely the product of confusions about language – in particular, disregard of principles (1), (2), and (3). (Let us call this the *principle of metaphysics as linguistic confusion*.)
  - (8) As a result of point (5), interpretation of other people is often a very difficult task; and as a result of point (2), a large part of the solution to it consists in carefully discerning interpretees' word-usages, in light of empirical observation of the ways in which they have actually used words. (Let us call this the *principle of interpretive difficulty and discerning word-usage*.)
  - (9) Again because of (5), translation from one language into another is also often a very difficult task, and again because of (2), a large part of the solution to it consists in "bending" preexisting word-usages from the target language over the course of the translation in order thereby to approximate the relevant word-usages in the source language. (Let us call this the *principle of translation difficulty and bending word-usage*.)

These seminal principles developed by the Herder-Hamann tradition would all enjoy a vibrant afterlife in nineteenth-century philosophy of language.

#### HEGEL

Many German philosophers from the early nineteenth century were very interested in language,<sup>2</sup> few more so than Hegel (1770–1831).

Hegel adopted many of the principles listed previously – though he also modified and developed them in significant ways. The period 1803–7, culminating in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), was especially important in this connection (the rest of his career less so).<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the *Phenomenology*: As can already be seen from the opening "Sense-certainty" section, Hegel is strongly inclined to accept the *thought-language principle*. However, early parts of the "Religion" chapter show that he is somewhat torn about it, since he is tempted to broaden the range of symbolic media that can serve as vehicles for thought to include, besides language, also nonlinguistic arts such as architecture and sculpture. And this revised version of the principle later became his standard position in the *Aesthetics* lectures.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in addition to those discussed in the next two sections (Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schlegel, and Wilhelm von Humboldt), also Fichte, Bernhardt, and the later Reinhold.

<sup>3</sup> Interpretations such as Derrida's "The Pit and the Pyramid" that focus on Hegel's *Encyclopedia* therefore do not encounter his views about language at their most interesting.

In the *Phenomenology* he also accepts a version of the *meaning-usage principle*, developing in its support over the course of the book a systematic critique of alternative conceptions of meaning, such as those that equate meanings with referents (“Sense-certainty”), Platonic forms (“Force and the Understanding”), or mental “ideas” (“Physiognomy”). In addition, one of the central tasks of the work presupposes that principle, namely, the task of modifying the everyday usages of words in systematic ways in order to enable them to constitute new, superior concepts. (This task largely explains the distinctive obscurity of the work.)

Hegel also accepts a version of the *meaning-sensation principle*. Thus he says later in the *Encyclopedia* that the pseudo-Aristotelian tag “There is nothing in the intellect that was not in the senses” is correct, provided only that the converse is admitted as well.

He also accepts the *principle of indirect reference*, in particular arguing in the “Sense-certainty” section that even the most promising-looking candidates for direct reference to particulars, indexical words such as “This,” “Now,” “Here,” and “I,” implicitly presuppose general concepts, or “universals.”

He also accepts a version of the *diversity principle*. Thus the central project of the book is the exploration of the various different “shapes of consciousness” that have arisen over the course of history. However, here again the book is torn, for its later chapters also imply that there are some deep continuities in thought across times and places, namely, in the domains of art, religion, and philosophy. And this contrary position also predominates in Hegel’s later lecture series on those three domains.

Finally, the book also embraces the *language-sociality principle*, indeed developing over its course an argument that is designed to prove a particularly strong version of this principle that linguistic meaning (and hence also thought, human mental life generally, and the very self) is fundamentally social. The general strategy of the argument is to consider every possible individualistic account of meaning in turn and refute it, thereby motivating the conclusion that meaning is instead social in nature. In addition, Hegel presupposes this principle in the more specific way in which he conceives the work’s task (already mentioned) of constructing new usages of words in order to constitute new, superior concepts: the task here is, more specifically, to make these new usages broadly accepted by society.

#### INTERPRETATION- AND TRANSLATION-THEORY: SCHLEIERMACHER AND FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL

Some of the most important philosophical work on language in the nineteenth century concerned the theory of interpretation (“hermeneutics”) and the theory of translation. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829)

were the main figures here. Their ideas on these subjects began to take shape in the late 1790s, when they were living together in Berlin. Many of them are shared, and it is often unclear which of the two men was the original source. But since Schleiermacher's surviving treatments are more systematic and detailed than Schlegel's, we should focus first and foremost on the former.

Schleiermacher's theories of interpretation and translation rest on versions of the Herder-Hamann *thought-language*, *meaning-usage*, and *diversity principles*. The *diversity principle* poses a profound challenge to both interpretation and translation, and the theories' main task is to cope with it.

To this stock of inherited principles Schleiermacher adds a more *holistic* conception of meaning than was yet held by Herder or Hamann. At least three aspects of his semantic holism can be distinguished: (i) He espouses a doctrine of "the unity of the word-sphere." In effect, this says that the various distinguishable senses that a single word typically bears, which are normally distinguished by a good dictionary entry (e.g., the different senses of "impression" in "He made an impression in the clay," "My impression is that he is reluctant," and "He made a big impression at the party"), always form a larger semantic unity to which they all essentially belong (so that any loss, addition, or alteration among them entails a change in each of them). (ii) He holds that any particular concept is partly defined by its relations to a "system of concepts." In this connection, he especially emphasizes a concept's relations as a species-concept to superordinate genus-concepts, relations as a genus-concept to subordinate species-concepts, and relations of contrast to coordinate concepts falling under the same genus-concepts. However, other types of conceptual relationships would be relevant here as well (e.g., those between "to work," "a work," and "a worker"). (iii) He holds that the distinctive nature of a language's *grammatical* system (e.g., its system of declensions) is partly constitutive of the character of the concepts expressed by the language. Schleiermacher perceives that this threefold semantic holism exacerbates the challenge to interpretation and translation already posed by the *diversity principle*.<sup>4</sup>

Schleiermacher lectured on hermeneutics frequently between 1805 and 1833. The following are some of his main principles:

- (a) Hermeneutics is strictly the art of *understanding* verbal communication – as *contrasted*, not equated, with explicating, applying, or translating it.
- (b) Hermeneutics should be a *universal* discipline – that is, one that applies equally to both sacred and secular texts, to all subject-matters, to oral as well as written language, to modern texts as well as ancient, to works in one's own language as well as works in foreign languages, and so forth.

<sup>4</sup> A move toward semantic holism is one of the most original and striking features of nineteenth-century philosophy of language generally. We will encounter several further representatives and forms of such a holism in the course of this chapter.

- (c) In particular, the interpretation of sacred texts such as the Bible falls within it – this must not rely on *special* principles, such as divine inspiration (of either the author or the interpreter).
- (d) Interpretation is in one way an easier task than is sometimes realized, in that at least an author's thoughts and meanings cannot transcend his linguistic competence, as, for example, Plato supposed. (This is an application of the *thought-language* and *meaning-usage principles*.) But in another way it is a much more difficult task than is usually realized: contrary to a common misconception that "understanding occurs as a matter of course," "misunderstanding occurs as a matter of course, and so understanding must be willed and sought at every point." (This is a consequence of the *diversity principle*: the principle that deep linguistic and conceptual-intellectual diversity occurs.)

How, then, is it to be accomplished?

- (e) Before interpretation proper can even begin, the interpreter must acquire a good knowledge of the text's historical context.<sup>5</sup>
- (f) Interpretation always has two sides: one "linguistic," the other "psychological." Linguistic interpretation's basic task (which rests on the *meaning-usage principle*) is to infer from the particular known uses of a word to the rule governing them, that is, to its usage, and thus to its meaning. Psychological interpretation instead focuses on the author's individual psychology. Linguistic interpretation is mainly concerned with what is shared in a language; psychological interpretation, with what is distinctive to a particular author.
- (g) Why must the interpreter complement linguistic interpretation with psychological in this way? Schleiermacher implies several reasons. First, the need to do so arises from the *diversity principle*, as it applies to individuals: the linguistic and conceptual-intellectual distinctiveness of individuals. This leads to the problem for linguistic interpretation that the actual uses of words that are available to serve as evidence from which to infer an author's exact usages or meanings are generally few in number and poor in contextual variety – a problem that the appeal to the author's psychology is supposed to help solve by providing additional clues. Second, the appeal to the author's psychology is required in order to resolve ambiguities in linguistic meaning that arise in particular contexts. Third, in order fully to understand a linguistic act one needs to grasp not only its linguistic meaning but also what more recent authors have called its "illocutionary" force or intention.
- (h) Interpretation also requires two different methods: a "comparative" method (i.e., a method of plain induction) and a "divinatory" method (i.e., a method of tentative, fallible hypothesis based on but also going well beyond available empirical evidence).<sup>6</sup> Schleiermacher sees the former method as predominating on the linguistic

<sup>5</sup> The suggestion in some of the secondary literature that Schleiermacher thinks such knowledge *irrelevant* to interpretation is absurd.

<sup>6</sup> The widespread notion in the secondary literature that "divination" is for Schleiermacher a process of psychological self-projection into texts is basically mistaken. Like Herder, because of the *diversity principle*, he is rather concerned to *discourage* interpreters from assimilating the outlooks of people they interpret to their own.

side of interpretation (where it takes the interpreter from the particular uses of a word to the rule for use governing them all), the latter on the psychological side.

- (i) Ideal interpretation is of its nature a holistic activity.<sup>7</sup> In particular, any given part of a text needs to be interpreted in light of the whole text to which it belongs, and both need to be interpreted in light of the whole language in which they are written, their historical context, a broader preexisting genre, the author's whole corpus, and the author's overall psychology. This holism introduces a pervasive circularity into interpretation, for, ultimately, interpreting such broader items in its turn depends on interpreting such parts of texts. This circularity might seem vicious. Schleiermacher denies that it is, however. Why? His solution is not that all of these tasks can be accomplished simultaneously – for that would be beyond human capacities. Instead, it turns on the (very plausible) thought that understanding is not an all-or-nothing matter but instead something that comes in *degrees*, so that it is possible to make progress toward full understanding in a gradual way. For example, concerning the relation between a part of a text and the whole text to which it belongs, he recommends that one first read through and interpret each of the parts of the text in turn as best one can in order thereby to arrive at an approximate overall interpretation of the text, and that one then apply this approximate overall interpretation in order to refine one's initial interpretations of the parts, which in turn gives one an improved overall interpretation, which can then be reapplied toward further refinement of the interpretations of the parts, and so on, indefinitely.

Up to this point, Schleiermacher's theory is almost identical to Herder's, mainly just drawing together and systematizing ideas that were already scattered throughout a number of Herder's works. This continuity extends far beyond the *thought-language*, *meaning-usage*, and *diversity principles*. For example, the theory also owes to Herder its two central moves (often wrongly thought to have been original with Schleiermacher) of complementing "linguistic" with "psychological" interpretation, and of identifying "divination" as the predominant method of the latter.<sup>8</sup> And both the theory's emphasis on the need for holism and its methodological solution for achieving it are from Herder as well.<sup>9</sup>

Schleiermacher's theory also contains some additional ideas that depart more sharply from Herder's, however. But it seems to me that it is precisely here that it tends to become most problematic. For example, whereas Herder's version of

<sup>7</sup> This principle to some extent rests on but also goes far beyond Schleiermacher's *semantic* holism.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Herder's *On Thomas Abbt's Writings* (1768) and *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* (1778).

<sup>9</sup> For the emphasis, see especially Herder's *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774); for the solution, his *Critical Forests* (1769). It is also worth noting that Friedrich Ast (1778–1841) in a work concerned with hermeneutics called *Basic Elements of Grammar, Hermeneutics, and Criticism*, which he published in 1808, likewise borrowed from Herder in the two general ways just mentioned, i.e., complementing linguistic with psychological interpretation and insisting on holism in interpretation.

the *thought-language principle* restricts itself to the claim that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by linguistic competence, Schleiermacher turns this into a principle of the outright *identity* of thought with language, or with inner language. But such a strong version of the principle is philosophically untenable – vulnerable to counterexamples in which thought occurs without any corresponding (inner) language use, and vice versa. Again, Schleiermacher adds to Herder's *meaning-usage principle* a thesis that concepts are empirical schemata (à la Kant): rules for the production of sensory images. But this too is problematic. In particular, Kant's theory of schematism had implied a sharp distinction between concepts or meanings (conceived as purely psychological) and word-usages, so that Schleiermacher's introduction of it here seems to imply the same, and hence to conflict with the *meaning-usage principle*. Again, whereas for Herder the *diversity principle* is only an empirically established rule of thumb, Schleiermacher attempts to give an a priori *proof* that linguistic and conceptual-intellectual diversity occurs, even at the individual level, *universally* – a proof that not only is very dubious in itself (both in its a priori status and in its specific details), but also has the highly counterintuitive consequence (often explicitly asserted by Schleiermacher) that, strictly speaking, no one *ever* fully understands another person. Again, unlike Herder, Schleiermacher specifies psychological interpretation more closely as a process of identifying, and tracing the necessary development of, a single “seminal decision [*Keimentschluß*]” of the author's that is the source of his work and unfolds itself as the work in a necessary fashion. But this too seems an unhelpful move. For how many works are actually composed, and hence properly interpretable, in such a way? Again, whereas Herder includes among the evidence relevant to psychological interpretation not only an author's linguistic behavior but also his nonlinguistic behavior, Schleiermacher normally insists on a restriction to the former. But this seems misguided (e.g., the marquis de Sade's recorded *acts* of cruelty are surely no less relevant to establishing the sadistic side of his psychology than his cruel *statements*). Again, whereas Herder rightly emphasizes that the correct identification of *genre* plays an essential role in interpretation, and that this is often extremely difficult as a result of variations in genres that occur across historical periods, cultures, individuals, and even different works by the same individual, Schleiermacher pays little attention to this. Again, unlike Herder, who normally regards interpretation and natural science as similar activities, Schleiermacher sees the central role that “divination,” or hypothesis, plays in interpretation as a ground for sharply *distinguishing* interpretation from natural science, and hence for classifying it as an art rather than a science, whereas he should arguably have seen it as one ground for judging them *similar* (a mistake that was caused by his false assumption that natural science works by plain induction rather than by hypothesis). And so forth.

Friedrich Schlegel's hermeneutics, though less systematic and detailed than Schleiermacher's, is in certain ways superior to it, and more of an advance. It is found scattered throughout a number of Schlegel's works, including the *Philosophy of Philology* (1797) and the *Athenaeum Fragments* (1798–1800). It resembles Schleiermacher's hermeneutics to a considerable extent. But it also includes the following four valuable features that are more or less missing from the latter: (i) Schlegel properly restores genre to a central place in the theory of interpretation and largely continues Herder's insights about it. (ii) Schlegel holds that (superior) texts often express *unconscious* meanings: "Every excellent work ... aims at more than it knows" (*On Goethe's "Meister"* [1798]). This is a very important point.<sup>10</sup> (iii) Schlegel emphasizes that works often express important meanings, not explicitly in their parts, but implicitly through the way in which these are put together to form a whole. This is again a very important point. (iv) Especially in the essay *On Incomprehensibility* (1800), but also elsewhere, Schlegel emphasizes that works typically contain confusions, and that it is essential for an interpreter to identify and explain these: "It is not enough that one understand the actual sense of a confused work better than the author understood it. One must also oneself be able to know, *characterize*, and even *construe* the confusion even down to its very principles." This is another very important point.

Schleiermacher's pupil Boeckh (1785–1867), an eminent classical philologist, later gave Schleiermacher's hermeneutics an even more systematic and detailed restatement in lectures that were eventually published under the title *Encyclopedia and Methodology of the Philological Sciences* (1877). In the course of doing so, he laudably restored genre to the central place that it had had in the hermeneutics of Herder and Schlegel. The combined influence of Schleiermacher's and Boeckh's treatments secured for this whole tradition of hermeneutics something like the status of the official interpretive methodology of nineteenth-century biblical and classical scholarship. The extraordinary quality of that scholarship is eloquent testimony to its value.

Turning now to the theory of translation, Schleiermacher's whole position concerning translation again rests on the Herder-Hamann *thought-language, meaning-usage*, and *diversity principles*, together with his own holism about meaning, which exacerbates the challenge to translation posed by the *diversity principle*.

<sup>10</sup> Schleiermacher sometimes implies a similar-looking position, most famously in his doctrine that the interpreter should aim to understand an author better than he understood himself. But that turns out to mean something rather tame, namely, that the interpreter should achieve an explicit grasp of grammatical and lexical rules that the interpretee only grasped implicitly, whereas Schlegel's position is much more radical – envisaging, indeed, an "infinite depth" of meaning largely unknown to the author.

Schleiermacher was himself a masterful translator, whose translations of Plato into German are still widely used and admired today, two centuries after they were done. His views about translation therefore carry a certain *prima facie* authority. He explains his theory of translation mainly in the classic essay *On the Different Methods of Translation* (1813). The following are his most important points:

- (a) Translation proper (as opposed to mere imitation) is an extremely difficult task, for it faces a number of serious challenges that admit of partial, but only partial, solution. The primary task of translation is to reproduce the original meaning accurately, and as we shall see in a moment, this is itself a huge challenge. But there are also some further tasks that add to the difficulty. For example, at least in the case of poetry it is necessary to reproduce not only semantic but also musical features of the original, such as meter and rhyme. Indeed, this is not only an aesthetic desideratum over and above translation's primary task of reproducing meaning, but also an essential *part* of the latter, since, for one thing, in poetry musical features serve as essential vehicles for the precise expression of affective sensations and hence of meanings (a point that rests on the *meaning-sensation principle*). Also, besides reproducing meaning a translation should convey where an author was being conceptually conventional and where, by contrast, conceptually original – a task that can be accomplished to a certain extent by using older vocabulary from the target language in the former cases and newer vocabulary from the target language in the latter cases. In addition to being intrinsically difficult, both of these secondary tasks will often stand in deep tension with the primary task of finding the closest semantic fit – for instance, it will often turn out that the target-word that would best reproduce a rhyme or best reflect a concept's vintage is not the one closest in meaning to the source-word.
- (b) The central challenge for translation, though, lies in its primary task of reproducing meaning accurately and arises from the fact that translation typically faces a conceptual gulf between the source language and the target language (at least, as the latter already exists). (This is an application of the *diversity principle*.)
- (c) Schleiermacher in particular notes the following complication here (which one might dub *the paradox of paraphrase*): if, when faced with the task of translating an alien concept, a translator attempts to reproduce its *intension* by reproducing its *extension* by means of an elaborate paraphrase in his own language, he will generally find that, as he gets closer to the original extension, he undermines the original intension in *other ways*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For instance, faced with the Homeric color word *chlōros*, which Homer sometimes applies to things that we would classify as green (e.g., healthy foliage) but at other times to things that we would classify as yellow (e.g., honey), a translator might attempt to capture its intension by reproducing its extension by means of the paraphrase “green or yellow.” However, in doing so he would sacrifice the original intension in other ways – since Homer did not *have* the concept green or the concept yellow (only the concept *chlōros*), and for Homer *chlōros* was not a *disjunctive* concept.



How, therefore, should translation proceed? The following points constitute the core of Schleiermacher's answer:

- (d) Because of such challenges the translator needs to have hermeneutical expertise and to be an "artist" if he is to cope with the task of translation at all adequately.
- (e) The conceptual gulf that poses the central challenge here might in principle be tackled in one of two ways: either by moving the author's linguistic-conceptual world closer to that of the reader of the translation or by moving the reader's closer to the author's. The former approach had been advocated by Luther in his essay *On Translating: An Open Letter* (1530) and had been practiced by him in his translation of the Bible (he called it *Verdeutschung*, "Germanizing"). However, Schleiermacher finds it unacceptable, because it distorts the author's meaning. He therefore champions the alternative approach of moving the reader toward the linguistic-conceptual world of the author as the only acceptable one.

But how can that possibly be accomplished?

- (f) The key, according to Schleiermacher, lies in the *plasticity* of language. Thanks to this plasticity, even if the usages of words, and hence the concepts, expressed by the target language *as it already exists* are incommensurable with the author's, the translator can "bend the language of the translation as far possible toward that of the original in order to communicate as far as possible an impression of the system of concepts developed in it." (This solution presupposes the *meaning-usage principle*).<sup>12</sup>
- (g) This approach requires translating a particular word from the source language in a uniform way throughout the translation rather than switching between two or more different ways of translating it in different contexts.
- (h) It also inevitably results in translations that are less easy to read than those that can be achieved by the competing approach (*Verdeutschung*).<sup>13</sup> However, this is an

<sup>12</sup> Consider, for example, such a translator faced with the task of translating Homer's ethical word *aretê* into English. He will recognize that nothing in existing English exactly expresses this concept. He will therefore judge that the best way to convey it in English is to modify existing English usage in a systematic way over the course of the translation in order thereby to mimic Greek usage and hence meaning. He will begin by taking the word from existing English that already comes closest to *aretê* in meaning, say the word *virtue*. However, he will recognize that the rule for use that governs this word in existing English is still very different from that which governs Homer's word *aretê*, so that the two words are still quite sharply different in meaning – that, for instance, the descriptive component of the rule that governs the word *virtue* in existing English makes it a solecism to ascribe *virtue* to a habitual liar or a pirate, but quite proper under certain circumstances to ascribe it to a physically weak man, whereas just the converse rule governs the word *aretê* in Homer. What therefore will he do? He will not simply resign himself to this discrepancy. Instead, for the duration of the translation he will modify the rule that governs the word *virtue* in order to make it resemble that which governs Homer's word *aretê*. For instance, he will drop the descriptive rule governing the word *virtue* that was just mentioned and switch to its converse instead, consequently for the duration of the translation writing quite happily of certain habitual liars and pirates as having *virtue* (e.g., Odysseus and Achilles, respectively) but scrupulously avoiding describing any physically weak man as having it. He will thereby succeed in expressing (or at least come close to expressing) the meaning of Homer's word *aretê* in English.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, to continue with the preceding note's example, the reader of such a translation of Homer will find himself faced with jarring descriptions of habitual liars and pirates as possessing *virtue*.

acceptable price to pay given that the only alternative is a failure to convey the author's meaning at all accurately. Moreover, the offending oddities have a positive value, in that they constantly remind the reader of the conceptual unfamiliarity of the material being translated and of the "bending" approach being employed.

- (i) In order to work effectively this approach needs to be applied consistently to large amounts of material, so that the reader both becomes generally accustomed to it and acquires enough examples of a particular word's unfamiliar use in enough different contexts to enable him to infer the unfamiliar rule for use that is involved.
- (j) Even this optimal approach has severe limitations, however. In particular, it will often be impossible to reproduce the *holistic* aspects of meaning – the several related usages of a given word, the system of related words/concepts, and the distinctive grammar of the language. And because these holistic features are internal to a word's meaning, that will entail a shortfall in the communication of its meaning by the translation. For this reason – together with such additional reasons as those mentioned in (a) – even this optimal sort of translation is bound to remain imperfect, only a poor second best to reading the originals.
- (k) It is still justified and important, however. This is true not only for the obvious reason that people who cannot read the original languages still need translations, but also for the less obvious reason that this optimal sort of translation through its "bending" approach enriches the conceptual resources of the target language, and through its approach of reproducing musical features, such as ancient meters, enriches the musical resources of the target language.<sup>14</sup>
- (l) Nor – Schleiermacher adds in answer to a worry that Herder had expressed – need it be feared that this enrichment will deprive the target language of its authentic character, for in cases where a real conflict with that character occurs, the enrichments involved will soon wither from the language.

Once again, not only the *thought-language, meaning-usage, and diversity principles*, but indeed *most* of these principles about translation are from Herder (especially from the *Fragments on Recent German Literature* [1767–8]): in particular, Schleiermacher's emphasis on the importance of reproducing the musical features of an original (poetic) text, and on doing so not only for aesthetic reasons but also for conveying its meaning accurately, as well as his central strategy of "bending" the target language in order to cope with the problem of conceptual incommensurability both do so.

However, whereas Schleiermacher's theory of interpretation tended to worsen Herder's, his theory of translation tends to refine Herder's in some modest but significant ways. Among the positions listed previously, examples of this occur in (a), where the ideal of making clear in translation at which points an author is being conceptually conventional and at which points conceptually original, together with the strategy for achieving it, is novel; in (c), where the paradox of

<sup>14</sup> Schleiermacher's ultimate picture of translation – as of interpretation – is therefore that it is a matter of striving for an ideal that is never fully attainable, although striving for it nonetheless remains very valuable and important. This is a characteristically Romantic model.

paraphrase is original; in (h), where the point that the discomfort of the “bending” approach for readers actually serves positive functions is novel; in (i), where the point that this approach needs to be implemented on a large scale is novel; in (j), where the point that semantic holism inevitably limits the success of such translations is novel; and in (l), which plausibly contradicts Herder.<sup>15</sup>

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE AND THE BIRTH  
OF LINGUISTICS: FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL AND  
WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT

Modern linguistics was founded in the nineteenth century by two philosophers who were both deeply steeped in the Herder-Hamann tradition: Friedrich Schlegel, whose main work in this connection is *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* (1808), which largely focuses on Sanskrit and its literature, and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), whose main work in this connection is his famous introduction to his massive study of the Kawi language, published separately under the title *The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and Its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind* (1836).

Schlegel's and Humboldt's general theories of language contain *many* borrowings from the Herder-Hamann tradition.<sup>16</sup> But most importantly, they founded modern linguistics on principles taken over from that tradition – especially the

<sup>15</sup> Besides Friedrich Schlegel and Boeckh, another important figure from this period who is in broad agreement with Schleiermacher's theories of interpretation and translation is Wilhelm von Humboldt (whom we are about to consider in another connection). For example, concerning interpretation, like Schleiermacher, Humboldt argues in his Kawi-introduction of 1836 that not only nations but also individuals within nations are always deeply different linguistically and conceptually-intellectually, so that “all understanding is always at the same time a misunderstanding.” And concerning translation, he argues in the introduction to his translation of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (1816) for an approach to translation that is virtually identical to Schleiermacher's.

<sup>16</sup> For example, they both subscribe to the naturalistic account of the origin of language that Herder had given in his *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), according to which language is interdependent and coeval with human awareness [*Besonnenheit*] (Schlegel restricting this to Sanskrit languages, however). Also, Humboldt strongly emphasizes a version of the *language-sociality* principle, the principle that language is fundamentally social in nature. Also, Humboldt is developing a version of the *principle of indirect reference* derived from Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784–91) when he argues in the Kawi-introduction that referring-terms never refer directly but only through the mediation of general concepts: “Even for [external physical objects] the word is not the equivalent of the object that hovers before the sense, but rather the conception thereof through language-production at the moment of finding the word. This is a notable source of the multiplicity of expressions for the same objects; and if in Sanskrit, for example, the *elephant* is now called the twice-drinking one, now the two-toothed one, and now the one equipped with a single hand, as many different concepts are thereby designated, though always the same object is meant.” (This position anticipates, and may well have influenced, a position of Frege's to be discussed later.)

*thought-language* and *diversity* principles, together with the resulting insight (which had already been explicitly formulated by Herder in his *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* [1784–91]) that an empirical investigation into languages in their diversity promises to provide a reliable window onto the diversity of modes of thought. This constituted their primary rationale for the new discipline of linguistics.

Building on that inherited theoretical foundation, they also developed the following more original positions:

- (a) Contrary to an impression that Herder and Hamann had generally still given that languages are merely aggregates of particular words/concepts, they espouse a more holistic conception of languages according to which such particular items are only possible in the context of a larger linguistic whole – a conception they often express by characterizing languages as “organisms,” “webs,” or “systems.”
- (b) More specifically, they identify *grammar* as the most fundamental unifying principle of such linguistic “organisms.”
- (c) In contrast to the early Herder – who in his *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772) had held that grammars are basically the same across all languages (except Chinese) – but in continuity with the late Herder – who in his *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784–91) had instead come to posit deep differences between the grammatical structures of languages – they both see grammars as differing profoundly from one language to another, and as thereby also constituting significant differences in particular words/concepts (which may differ for more superficial reasons as well).<sup>17</sup> (However, it should be noted that in Humboldt this position still stands in uneasy tension with the older and more dubious – albeit recently, since Chomsky, again fashionable – idea of an implicit universal grammar.)
- (d) They consequently identify “comparative grammar” (an expression that was first brought into currency by Schlegel’s *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*) as the main task of the empirical investigation of languages.
- (e) Besides the motive already explained of providing a reliable window on the diversity of thought, there is another important motive behind comparative grammar that they emphasize: comparative grammar promises to shed more light on the genealogical relations among languages than merely lexical comparisons can do.
- (f) They begin the process of actually comparing different grammars in an empirically careful way. In doing so, they develop a taxonomy of different types of grammars. Schlegel first draws a sharp contrast between, on the one hand, “organic,” or highly inflected, languages, of which Sanskrit is his prime example, and, on the other hand, “mechanical,” or uninflected, languages, of which Chinese is his main example. His brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), and Humboldt then elaborate this taxonomy, adding a category of “agglutinative” or “incorporative” languages.

<sup>17</sup> As we saw earlier, Schleiermacher likewise embraces versions of doctrines (a)–(c) at about the same period.

So far these steps taken by Schlegel and Humboldt clearly constitute progress. But there is also a more dubious part of their position:

- (g) They also draw from their comparison of different grammars certain strong normative conclusions about the relative merits of different languages as instruments of thought. In particular, they argue for the superiority of highly inflected languages such as Sanskrit and its relatives over uninflected languages such as Chinese. (This constitutes yet a third motive behind their project.) – This is a more dubious part of their position, both factually and morally. Concerning facts, their arguments for the superiority of one language-type over another are unconvincing. Schlegel's case consists in little more than wonderment at the supposed marvel of developed inflection, together with an implausible claim of its necessity for human "awareness," or rationality. Humboldt's case often consists in assuming, implausibly, that some explicit feature of Indo-European grammar is implicitly universal, and then faulting a non-Indo-European language for not realizing it explicitly.<sup>18</sup> At other times it consists in faulting distinctive features of non-Indo-European grammars as dysfunctional, in ways that overlook the possibility that the distinctive mode of life or social context within which they occur might in fact make them functional.<sup>19</sup> Concerning morality, this part of their position is also morally suspect, in that it tends to encourage – and later did encourage – an invidious ranking of peoples. On the other hand, one should not visit the sins of the sons on the fathers here (so to speak). Unlike their Nazi heirs, Schlegel and Humboldt were basically innocent of ethnocentric, xenophobic motives. Indeed, a large part of the purpose of Schlegel's book was to show that Europe and Asia are "one large family" (as he actually puts it) whose literatures should be treated as a single whole, and Humboldt often reveals similar cosmopolitan motives in his linguistic work.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, both men take considerable theoretical pains to try to forestall the inference of an invidious ranking of peoples from their normative conclusions about languages.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Some examples are the expression of relations by inflection, a clear morphological or syntactic distinction between verb and noun, a sharp distinction between word and sentence, and even the placement of the verb between the subject and the object.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in *On the Dual Form* (1827) Humboldt implicitly criticizes in this spirit native languages in which the third-person singular pronoun always specifies posture or distance from the speaker – which invites the response that such an economical inclusion of this sort of information might be very useful to a society living by hunting or warfare.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., *On the Diversity of Human Language Structure* (1827–9) and *On the Language of the South Sea Islands* (1828).

<sup>21</sup> Another, even more factually and morally dubious example of normative theorizing about language from the period should perhaps be mentioned here as well. Fichte in his *Speeches to the German Nation* (1808) draws a sharp normative distinction between the Romance languages and German, arguing that because the former are based on a different parent-language, Latin, they are not properly understood by their users and so produce intellectual unclarity, whereas German, as an *original* language, is linguistically transparent and therefore produces intellectual clarity. This argument is again factually flawed – both because it underestimates the extent of German's own indebtedness to other languages such as Latin and, perhaps more importantly, because it disregards an important principle that had already been established by earlier theorists such as Ernesti and Herder: that what determines a word's current meaning is not its *historical etymology* but its *current use*. Moreover, it is again morally objectionable as well, in that it encourages

Under the influence of Schlegel and Humboldt both the close analysis of individual languages, such as Sanskrit, and comparative grammar quickly developed into major fields of scientific inquiry in the nineteenth century. One early practitioner of the former was August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), who, under his younger brother's influence, became Germany's first real expert in Sanskrit. Prominent early practitioners of comparative grammar were Bopp (1791–1867), in his work on the Indo-European languages generally; Jakob Grimm (1785–1863), in his work on the Germanic languages in particular; and August Wilhelm Schlegel again, in his work on the Romance languages.

FROM A LINGUISTIC CRITIQUE OF PHILOSOPHY  
TO A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF LANGUAGE:  
GRUPPE, NIETZSCHE, AND MAUTHNER

The remainder of this chapter turns to some thinkers whose relations to the Herder-Hamann tradition are more ambiguous.

Three thinkers who share a broadly naturalistic, empirical, philological, and skeptical bent took over from the Herder-Hamann tradition the *principle of metaphysics as linguistic confusion*: Gruppe, Nietzsche, and Mauthner.<sup>22</sup>

In their own versions of that principle, Herder and Hamann had largely focused on attacking Kant. They had done so on three main grounds: first, for failing to recognize the essential dependence of thought and concepts on language (the *thought-language* and *meaning-usage principles*), and consequently also the historicity and sociality of thought and concepts (the *diversity* and *language-sociality principles*); second, for violating, both in his theory and in his linguistic practice, the principle that all linguistic meanings must be based in sensations (the *meaning-sensation principle*); and third, for hypostatizing what are really just collections of activities, on the basis of a misleading grammatical analogy (e.g., “Reason”).

The nowadays largely forgotten O. F. Gruppe (1804–76) undertook in a series of works to extend this sort of critique to other “speculative,” or metaphysical, philosophers as well. One of his first and main targets was Hegel, whom he criticized in this manner in his first work, *Antaeus: A Correspondence about Speculative Philosophy in Its Conflict with Science and Language* (1831). His critique of Hegel is largely misdirected because of Hegel's *own* deep commitment to the

an invidious ranking of peoples. And it is less easy to excuse Fichte in this respect than Schlegel and Humboldt. For, while it could be said in his defense that, like them, he had been a cosmopolitan earlier in his career, and that he was only provoked to adopt this position through Germany's occupation by the French under Napoleon, this very same fact also shows that, unlike them, he embraced it out of hatred for another people.

<sup>22</sup> These three thinkers were also influenced – as indeed were Herder and Hamann themselves – by the British Empiricists, especially Bacon, Locke, and Hume.

Herder-Hamann principles in question (as described previously), which Gruppe overlooks.<sup>23</sup> However, some of his other extensions of this sort of critique are more plausible.

In developing his linguistic critique of metaphysical philosophy, Gruppe, like the Herder-Hamann tradition before him, assumes that language is an essential foundation for any thought and contrasts metaphysical philosophers' errors in relation to language with what he takes to be language's sound condition in everyday use. The two remaining members of the group we are considering, Nietzsche and Mauthner, broke with him and the tradition in both these respects, (re)introducing the idea of a *nonlinguistic* form of thought or insight and complementing the linguistic critique of metaphysical philosophy with a broader critique of language in general.

Nietzsche (1844–1900) is the most original member of this group. He takes over many ideas from the Herder-Hamann tradition but also transforms them radically. He too offers a linguistic critique of metaphysical philosophy broadly in the spirit of the *principle of metaphysics as linguistic confusion*. Thus, according to him, the central error of metaphysical philosophers lies in positing imaginary entities over and above sensations – such as substances, selves, and God – and this is something they are seduced into by the distinctive grammar of Indo-European languages, in particular their *subject-predicate* structure (for this diagnosis, see, e.g., *Beyond Good and Evil* [1886], par. 20).

However, Nietzsche also departs from his predecessors by representing even ordinary language and thought as subject to similar illusions. For one thing, according to him, the illusory reifications just mentioned (substances, selves, God, etc.) and their source in subject-predicate grammar are not confined to philosophers but afflict everyday (Indo-European) language and thought as well. For another thing, and even more fundamentally, according to him, *all* language – and consequently, since he accepts a *version* of the *thought-language principle*, all thought too *in a way* – is distorting. Thus in his early lectures on rhetoric (1872–3) and the essay *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873) he argues – in a radical transformation of the *meaning-sensation principle* – that *all* language-use is merely metaphorical and hence distorts its basis in sensations. His case for this has several parts. First, he adduces a fairly impressive array of empirical evidence for the widespread presence of metaphors in languages, for example, the gendering of nouns. Second, he argues that our attempts to capture the reality of our sensations in language and thought inevitably involve not just one but two steps of

<sup>23</sup> Similarly, a little later Marx would criticize Hegel on the basis of a misconception that Hegel had a conventional dualistic conception of the relation of the mind to physical nature, whereas Hegel had, in fact, again largely under Herder's influence, moved to a physical-behavioristic conception of the mind.

creative transformation of it: initially that from the given sensory stimulus to a sensory image, and then also that from the sensory image to the quite different medium of language and thought.<sup>24</sup> Third, he argues that any application of general concepts to sensory experience both distortingly abstracts from aspects of the latter (see in the essay just cited his *Schlange/schlingen* example) and distortingly assimilates to one another cases of sensory experience that are in reality unique in character (see in the same essay his example of the leaf). (This third argument implicitly assumes, in the spirit of the Herder-Hamann *principle of indirect reference*, that the use of general concepts is fundamental to all descriptive language.)

These arguments implicitly rest on an assumption that is sharply at odds with the Herder-Hamann tradition's own version of the *thought-language principle*: namely, that we have a form of *nonlinguistic insight into reality*, and specifically into what Nietzsche in later work calls "the formless unformulable world of the chaos of sensations" (*The Will to Power* [1883–8], par. 569). This assumption becomes explicit at around the time of the texts just discussed in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), where Nietzsche posits a nonlinguistic, musical form of insight into the primal Dionysiac chaos of reality. The fact that he is implicitly making this assumption in the texts just discussed explains why he is unconcerned there about such obvious potential objections to his arguments as the following (which have since been leveled against them by some commentators): Is it not incoherent to purport to state or think how things really are as a basis for an argument whose conclusion is that *no* statement or thought can capture how things really are? And is that conclusion not indeed also *self-defeating*? Nietzsche's solution to these puzzles lies in the fact that the statements and corresponding thoughts in question are in both cases ultimately meant to be no more than poor surrogates for what is at bottom a nonlinguistic insight.

However, in making this implicit assumption Nietzsche does not simply disregard or dismiss the Herder-Hamann tradition. Instead, he makes a large concession to it: he accepts a *version* of the *thought-language principle* (as well as a *version* of the *language-sociality principle*, the principle of the sociality of language and thought) – but a version restricted to *conscious* thought, which he considers to be merely superficial (see especially *The Gay Science* [1882], par. 354).

The philosophical plausibility of Nietzsche's case thus largely turns on the plausibility of this radical modification of the Herder-Hamann *thought-language principle*, this exemption of a putative form of nonlinguistic insight from its scope.

In sum, Nietzsche's overall position in this area is heavily indebted to the Herder-Hamann tradition but also transforms it almost beyond recognition – in

<sup>24</sup> He here implicitly re-etymologizes the word "metaphor" to mean "carrying over," and hence lends it a somewhat broader sense than usual.



particular, leaving us with the radically different picture that, not only metaphysics, but language and conscious thought in general are pervasively distorting, and that they stand in contrast to a deeper nonlinguistic insight into reality.

A final member of this group of thinkers is F. Mauthner (1849–1923), whose most important works in this connection are *Contributions to a Critique of Language* (1902) and *Dictionary of Philosophy* (1910). Mauthner is heavily influenced by Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche, he develops a linguistic critique of metaphysical philosophy (as well as of related fields, e.g., theology and political theory) in which he rejects such concepts as the self and God as mere reifications superimposed on the chaos of sensations. Again like Nietzsche, he complements that critique with a broader critique of *all* language – in particular, arguing, as Nietzsche had done, that over and above the sorts of reifications just mentioned, all language involves a metaphorical distortion of sensations. And yet again like Nietzsche, he develops this argument on the basis of an assumption of a deeper nonlinguistic insight into the chaos of sensations.

However, *unlike* Nietzsche (at least after *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872]), Mauthner conceives this deeper nonlinguistic insight and its subject-matter in exalted religious terms – writing in this connection of a “godless mysticism.” And again unlike Nietzsche, he not only assumes such an insight in his argument but also makes the ultimate goal of his critique of language the overcoming (or, as he puts it, “suicide”) of language and the attainment of this insight in its purity.

Mauthner is a much better philosopher than some of the secondary literature on him would lead one to suspect. Nonetheless, his ideas are largely derivative rather than original. His main importance arguably lies in his influence on the greatest twentieth-century philosopher of language, Wittgenstein (1889–1951). Wittgenstein had already read Mauthner’s *Contributions* before writing the *Tractatus* (1921) (he mentions Mauthner there, albeit somewhat critically), and the strong influence of the former work on the latter is obvious. For example, they share the conceptions that (philosophical) language is a “ladder” eventually to be kicked away and that a nonlinguistic mystical insight is of fundamental importance. This connection throws significant light on the *Tractatus*.<sup>25</sup> But it is perhaps even more important for another reason, namely, that Mauthner seems to have functioned as a general conduit of ideas from the Herder-Hamann tradition to Wittgenstein. Anyone familiar with Wittgenstein’s work, especially in his later period, cannot but be struck by the extraordinary measure of agreement between its central principles and the principles attributed to the Herder-Hamann tradition at the

<sup>25</sup> For example, since Mauthner was already committed to a conception that although all (philosophical) language use is profoundly flawed, certain forms of it are more revealing than others, the “resolute” reading of the *Tractatus* recently championed by Cora Diamond and others is probably anachronistic.

beginning of this chapter – especially, the *thought-language*, *meaning-usage*, *diversity*, *language-sociality*, and *metaphysics as linguistic confusion principles*. It would be implausible to suppose that this agreement is merely coincidental. And so one is moved to ask how Wittgenstein became acquainted with the Herder-Hamann tradition's principles. Mauthner is a large part of the answer to that question. He is himself explicitly committed to versions of most of the Herder-Hamann tradition's principles, including the five just mentioned. Moreover, his work contains copious explicit discussions of Herder, Hamann (whom he especially admires), and other people influenced by them.<sup>26</sup>

#### THEORIES OF MEANING AND REFERENCE:

##### J. S. MILL AND FREGE

Two further nineteenth-century philosophers whose relations to the Herder-Hamann tradition are again ambiguous made important contributions to the philosophy of language, and in particular to the analysis of meaning and reference: J. S. Mill (1806–73) and especially Frege (1848–1925). (As an arch-empiricist and an arch-Rationalist, respectively, the two are in many ways philosophical opponents.)

A good litmus test for continuity with the Herder-Hamann tradition, and a reasonable criterion for being described as a “philosopher of language” in the strict sense, is adherence to the *thought-language* and *meaning-usage principles*. Judged in these terms, Mill and Frege occupy equivocal positions.

Mill is committed to a version of the *thought-language principle*. Thus he begins his *System of Logic* (1843) with a chapter significantly titled “Of the Necessity of Commencing with an Analysis of Language,” in which he argues that doing so is necessary because (a) “reasoning, or inference ... is an operation which usually takes place by means of words, and in complicated cases can take place in no other way”; and especially (b) “a proposition ... is formed by putting together two names ..., is *discourse, in which something is affirmed or denied of something*.” Mill does not commit himself to the *meaning-usage principle*, the equation of meaning with word-usage, though his position could probably be married with such a principle without great difficulty.

Frege's position is even more equivocal. He too is committed to a version of the *thought-language principle*, but a very qualified one. As Dummett points out in

<sup>26</sup> One small but revealing symptom of the depth of Mauthner's impact on both the early and the late Wittgenstein is a plethora of metaphors that they share in their discussions of language: long before Wittgenstein, Mauthner had already described (his philosophical) language as a “ladder” eventually to be kicked away, called language a “tool,” spoken of its “game-rules,” likened it to a “river” or “riverbed,” compared it to an “old city,” etc.

“Was Frege a Philosopher of Language?” between 1882 and 1924–5 Frege repeatedly says that human beings can only think by means of language and justifies his own focus on language in such terms.<sup>27</sup> However, his version of this principle is heavily qualified: he explicitly emphasizes in 1924–5 that it applies only to *human beings*, and that he sees no impossibility in the existence of other creatures who think, or indeed even think the very same thoughts as human beings, *without* using language. Moreover, this qualification is a consequence of a positive theory of the nature of thoughts that is sharply contrary to the spirit of the *thought-language principle*, namely, a form of Platonism (albeit one trimmed of some of the metaphysical bells and whistles of Plato’s own Platonism). According to Frege’s Platonism, thoughts are eternal objects quite independent of us, to which, in thinking, we merely come to stand in a certain cognitive relation. Frege is committed to such a theory from an early period but articulates it most fully in his late essay *The Thought* (1918–19).<sup>28</sup> Concerning the *meaning-usage principle*, pace Dummett (in the essay recently cited), Frege’s position is completely inconsistent with it, since for him senses generally, like thoughts in particular (i.e., the senses of whole sentences), are eternal objects entirely independent of us.

In short, Mill and Frege are to some extent continuous with the Herder-Hamann tradition and can to some extent be described as “philosophers of language.”<sup>29</sup> But the extent is not very great, especially in the case of Frege.<sup>30</sup>

Where Frege is concerned, the ambiguity of his relation to the Herder-Hamann tradition (including now its more direct heirs, such as Schleiermacher and Humboldt) extends further. There are a few additional striking continuities – for example, in the classic essay *On Sense and Reference* (1892) Frege continues and develops the *principle of indirect reference*, the principle that linguistic reference to particulars is never direct but is always mediated by general concepts (a principle Humboldt had championed in the meantime). But Frege more commonly rejects the Herder-Hamann tradition in a sharp and deliberate way (albeit without naming names). For example, in *The Foundations*

<sup>27</sup> It is reasonable to assume that the – by this period pervasively influential – Herder-Hamann tradition was a significant influence on Frege here. However, the situation is complicated. The Herder-Hamann tradition was itself ultimately indebted for the *thought-language principle* to Leibniz (see esp. Leibniz’s *Dialogue on the Connection between Things and Words* [1677]). And Frege almost certainly absorbed the doctrine not only from the Herder-Hamann tradition but also in more direct ways from Leibniz (e.g., through Trendelenburg).

<sup>28</sup> His main argument for this Platonism is the rather dubious one that unless thoughts had such a character – if instead they were somehow created by human beings – there could be no timeless truths or truths concerning times prior to human existence.

<sup>29</sup> One can more readily persuade oneself of this by contrasting their positions with those of eighteenth-century counterparts such as Hume and Kant, respectively, which were more radically nonlinguistic.

<sup>30</sup> It is, of course, absurd to claim, as Dummett and Kenny do, that Frege *began* the philosophy of language.

of *Arithmetic* (1884) and elsewhere he argues strongly against the sort of psychologism about concepts that is involved in the Herder-Hamann *meaning-sensation principle*, and against the Herder-Hamann tradition's related position that concepts emerge from human minds and history (he instead argues that it is only our *knowledge* of them that does so). Indeed, he evidently developed his own Platonism largely in deliberate opposition to these aspects of the Herder-Hamann tradition. Again, in his essay *On Concept and Object* (1892) he takes to task the Schleiermacher-Humboldt position that different individuals never use words with exactly the same meaning and that exact translations between languages are never possible, arguing that on the contrary in the relevant cases the *sense* or *thought* is often shared and communicated exactly, and it is only the psychological "coloring" that is discrepant. Thus his own important distinction between "sense" and mere "coloring" was developed in conscious opposition to the Schleiermacher-Humboldt position, and partly from a motive of avoiding it.<sup>31</sup> A further distinctive feature of Frege's position that sharply divides him from the Herder-Hamann tradition is a disparaging, or at best ambivalent, attitude toward ordinary language and a predominating ambition to develop an ideal logical language for scientific use, especially for realizing his "logicist" program of reducing arithmetic to logic (a program that of course eventually failed with the discovery of Russell's contradiction).

Despite the tenuousness of his status as a "philosopher of language" in the strict sense defined earlier, Frege did make extremely important contributions to the philosophy of language. Salient among these are certain distinctions that he drew clearly for the first time in the area of what we generally think of as "meaning." While the exact ways in which he drew these distinctions are questionable in certain respects, it seems beyond doubt that the distinctions are valid and important in *some* form:

- (a) In *On Sense and Reference* (1892) Frege famously draws a sharp distinction between a referring-term's *reference* [*Bedeutung*] and its *sense* [*Sinn*] (a distinction that he had himself failed to observe in his earlier work). His main argument for this distinction turns on the fact that we can make not only true *uninformative* identity-statements such as "The Morning Star = The Morning Star," but also true *informative* identity-statements such as "The Morning Star = The Evening Star." This fact only seems explicable on the assumption that the referring-terms involved possess different senses in addition to their identical referents.

<sup>31</sup> Therefore, when Dummett argues in his essay "The Relative Priority of Thought and Language" that Frege had not yet recognized our modern distinction between the meaning of an expression in the common language and an individual's grasp of it, he in effect misrepresents as Frege's ignorance of a position that had not yet been developed what was in reality Frege's reaction against a position with which he was already very familiar in an extreme form.

Frege also points out in the essay that we sometimes encounter referring-terms that lack referents but do nonetheless have senses (e.g., “the least rapidly convergent series”). This suggests a further argument for the distinction: referring-terms often have senses despite lacking referents (or despite their referents’ having ceased to exist). Several commentators have indeed taken this to be Frege’s main argument for the distinction. It is actually a very compelling argument for it. But it did not play a major role for Frege, and there is an interesting reason why not that well illustrates the distinctive character of his philosophy, the extent to which it is oriented to a scientific purpose and in particular to the development of an ideal logical language: in Frege’s view, a proper scientific language will not contain any referring-terms that lack referents, because such terms undermine science’s concern with truth and make logic inapplicable. How so? According to him, this is because it is a precondition of a proposition’s having a truth-value that its referring-terms really refer, so that any proposition that contains referring-terms that fail to refer will ipso facto both lack a truth-value and in consequence also fail to conform to such logical laws as the law of bivalence or excluded middle. By contrast, science *cannot* dispense with informative identity statements, which in particular play an essential role in mathematics, so that appealing to *these* as a reason for drawing the distinction between sense and reference is acceptable.<sup>32</sup>

- (b) Frege in *On Sense and Reference*, *The Thought*, and elsewhere also draws a sharp distinction between sense and what he variously calls mere “ideas,” “coloring,” and so on – by which he means mere psychological accompaniments of sense. This is another vitally important distinction, which any plausible account of meaning seems bound to preserve in *some* form.

However, there are several problems with the *particular way* in which Frege draws the distinction: (i) He conceives it as dividing two sharply separate ontological realms: the Platonic realm of eternal, mind-independent senses, on the one hand, and the psychological realm, on the other. Clearly, if one is skeptical about his Platonism (as one probably should be), one will have to recast this aspect of the distinction. Indeed, in light of the Herder-Hamann *meaning-usage* and especially *meaning-sensation principles*, it may well be that sense really includes a psychological aspect, so that the distinction needs to be reconceived as one that

<sup>32</sup> To be a little more precise: for Frege identity statements play an indispensable role in both arithmetic and geometry. Arithmetic he considers *analytic* a priori, in virtue of his logicism. That might seem to imply that all true arithmetical identity statements are uninformative, but in fact he denies this. Geometry he considers predominantly *synthetic* a priori, so that true geometrical identity statements are for him even more clearly in some cases informative. It is therefore not an accident that in giving his argument for the sense-reference distinction from informative identity statements in *On Sense and Reference* he uses a mathematical, and more specifically a geometrical, example.

(at least in part) falls *within* the psychological. (ii) Frege draws the distinction in a way that classifies as mere differences of coloring rather than of sense many differences that by intuitive lights would seem clearly to be differences of sense. For example, in *The Thought* he classifies the difference between “and” and “but” as merely one of coloring, not of sense. Such oddities result from the fact that he uses as the criterion of sameness of word-sense *interchangeability-in-sentences-without-change-of-truth-value* (except, of course, in cases where mere mention or homonymy is involved) – together with his conviction that this criterion is satisfied by such word pairs as “and” and “but.” However, the oddities only result from his use of this criterion under a further assumption. Someone might urge that the criterion is a valid one but that, pace Frege, it in fact yields the intuitive answer for cases like “and” and “but,” namely, that they *differ* in sense. Cannot, for example, the sentence “Smith said/believed that Jones was good-natured *and* foolish” be true while the sentence “Smith said/believed that Jones was good-natured *but* foolish” is false (and vice versa)? What blocks this reasoning for Frege and leads him to his counterintuitive conclusion for cases like “and” and “but” is an assumption that in such contexts of indirect speech, belief-reporting, and so on, words do not have their usual senses – specifically, he holds that they *refer* to their usual senses and that they do so by means of senses that are different from their usual ones – so that such contexts are no more relevant to the criterion in question than would be contexts in which normal homonymy occurs. However, this assumption itself seems very dubious, for it is surely quite implausible to say that, for example, “but” has two different senses in “Jones is good-natured but foolish” and “Smith said that Jones was good-natured but foolish.” It is therefore in the end attractive to suggest the following revision of Frege: while interchangeability-in-sentences-without-change-of-truth-value is indeed a valid criterion of sameness of word-sense, it needs to be applied in a way that *includes* sentences containing indirect speech, belief-reports, and so forth.<sup>33</sup> We thereby free ourselves *both* from Frege’s implausible assumption that words change their senses when they enter such contexts *and* from his counterintuitive conclusion that such differences as that between “and” and “but” are merely ones of coloring rather than sense.

<sup>33</sup> It has sometimes been questioned whether even this version of the criterion would be strictly correct. For example, Simon Blackburn in *Spreading the Word* (1984) questions this on the grounds that despite the fact that “widow” means the same as “person who had a husband who died while still married to her and has not since remarried,” we may on occasion correctly describe someone as puzzling whether all and only widows are people who had a husband, etc., but not as puzzling whether all and only widows are widows (since everyone knows that). However, I would suggest that such apparent counterexamples can in fact be coped with – for instance, in this case by noting that when it is correct to report that someone is puzzling whether all and only widows are people who had a husband, etc., this is possible because the report involves a disguised (degree of) *mention* of “widow” rather than a (pure) *use* of it.

(iii) Frege tends to lump together as mere “ideas” or “coloring” a number of things that really need to be distinguished. These include, for instance, what Grice calls “conversational implicatures,” that is, roughly, propositions that, though not part of the sense of a form of words (not implications), are such that any competent user of a language will associate them with the use of that form of words in a particular context; propositions that individuals associate with a form of words in a merely idiosyncratic way; attitudes or sensations not actually expressed but nonetheless conventionally communicated by a form of words (e.g., in the case of “After you!” respect); and attitudes or sensations that individuals associate with a form of words in a merely idiosyncratic way. (iv) Frege tends to regard all “ideas” or “coloring” as radically private, that is, unsharable and incommunicable. This is clearly untrue of at least some of the items just listed (e.g., conversational implicatures), and indeed arguably of them all.<sup>34</sup>

- (c) A third vitally important distinction that Frege draws, especially in *The Thought*, is that between a *thought* or sentential-sense, on the one hand, and the *force* with which it is used (e.g., assertion or question), on the other. One area in which this distinction had not been properly observed before Frege was formal logic. Logicians such as Kant had conceived propositional logic as concerned exclusively with “judgments.” This in effect amounted to assuming, falsely, that all (logically treatable) thoughts occur as (mental or verbal) *assertions*. To the extent that this assumption was taken seriously, it precluded not only the exploration of logical relations involving thoughts that occur within other types of force (e.g., questions) but also the analysis of even *asserted* compound thoughts into component thoughts that occur within them but without themselves being asserted (e.g., “p” and “q” within “If p then q”).<sup>35</sup> Frege’s distinction has since been extended and refined by some of the most important twentieth-century work in the philosophy of language, especially the theory of “locutionary” versus “illocutionary” force developed by Austin, Searle, and others.

Turning now to another topic, Mill and Frege both advance important but conflicting theories about the nature of proper names (i.e., names such as “Barack Obama” and “Japan” – not what Frege *himself* calls “proper names,” which includes *all* singular referring-terms).

<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, (iii) and (iv) are only *tendencies* in Frege, for his work does also contain some small hints of different, more nuanced, and better positions. For example, at one point in *On Sense and Reference* he recognizes a class of “overtone of subsidiary thoughts, which are however not explicitly expressed and therefore should not be reckoned in the sense” (emphasis added).

<sup>35</sup> Kant had attempted to avoid such disastrously constricting consequences by invoking a class of “problematic judgments.” However, this arguably amounted less to a solution than to an implicit self-contradiction. (A more charitable reading, recently championed by Béatrice Longuenesse, for example, would in effect *make* a Kantian “judgment” a Fregean thought.)

Mill argues that, unlike general names (e.g., “geese,” “men”), proper names have only denotation, not connotation (or, in Frege’s terminology, only reference, not sense). According to Mill, they function as mere labels.

Prima facie at least, this theory is implausible. Proper names certainly *seem* to have connotation for anyone competent in their use – for instance, anyone competent in using the name “Barack Obama” must at least know that he is a man; anyone competent in using the name “Japan,” that it is a country. Also, since proper names are not *literally* labels, it is unclear how on such a theory they could succeed in picking out an object. Also, how could such a theory account for the informativeness of identity statements involving proper names (e.g., “Cicero is Tully”)? And so forth.

Frege offers a much more promising-looking theory: like other referring-terms, proper names have not only a reference but also a sense, and they succeed in picking out the former by means of the latter. More specifically, the sense of a proper name is a definite description (i.e., a uniquely referring expression of the form “the such-and-such”). This theory was subsequently taken over by Russell. It also formed the starting point for an important variant theory first developed by Wittgenstein and then adopted by Searle, Strawson, and others that identifies the sense of a proper name, not with a *single* definite description, but rather with a *cluster* of definite descriptions understood to be, not necessarily all, but *mostly* true of some single object. This variant theory has certain advantages over the original theory. In particular, it seems truer to the usual psychological condition of competent users of proper names. And it is better able to cope with the objection to the original theory that it is normally possible to deny any given definite description of the bearer of a proper name without self-contradiction (e.g., while it is indeed false, it does not seem actually self-contradictory to deny that Barack Obama is the current president of the United States).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Frege’s theory and this variant theory have in recent years been subjected to a subtle critique by Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* (1980) (Kripke instead prefers an account closer to Mill’s). However, it seems very doubtful that Kripke’s critique succeeds.

Kripke’s case turns mainly on two points: (i) Proper names are “rigid” (i.e., pick out the same referent in all possible worlds), whereas definite descriptions are “nonrigid,” so that it cannot be true that the latter constitute the sense of the former. (ii) People who use a proper name are in some cases unable to provide any definite description that might uniquely pick out its referent at all (e.g., someone may use the name “Cicero” without knowing more than that he was a Roman orator), and in other cases the only definite descriptions they associate with the name turn out to be false of the referent (e.g., it is probably not in fact true that Jonah was “the ancient Israelite who was swallowed and then regurgitated by a whale,” for, although it is likely that he is a historical figure, that story is probably a mere legend).

Neither of these points seems compelling on reflection. Point (i) loses its force when one realizes that definite descriptions can be used *rigidly* as well as nonrigidly – that someone can, for example, use the definite description “the current president of the United States” in the sense “the current president of the United States, *that very man*.” (Kripke is himself skeptical that a rigid



Finally, Frege also advanced several further theses that would later play important roles in twentieth-century philosophy of language, either as inspirations or as targets of attack:

- (i) It was mainly he who was responsible for introducing the idea, subsequently fundamental to much twentieth-century philosophy of language, that the sentences and subsentential components of ordinary language are often misleading in their grammatical appearance – that they often have a quite different implicit structure, which can be spelled out by a logical language. For example, according to Frege's *Begriffsschrift* (1879), sentences such as “All men are mortal” and “Some men are mortal,” which appear to be subject-predicate in form, turn out not in fact to be so. This idea subsequently gained ground with Russell's analysis of definite descriptions (and of ordinary proper names in terms of them), as well as with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1921), and continues to be influential in some recent philosophy of language (e.g., Davidson).

use of definite descriptions occurs, but his skepticism seems implausible.) Hence a Fregean can cope with argument (i) by identifying the sense of a proper name with a *rigid* definite description (or a cluster of such definite descriptions).

Point (ii) loses its force when one realizes that the definite descriptions that constitute the sense of a proper name for a particular user might include such definite descriptions as “the ancient Roman whom most classical scholars refer to as ‘Cicero’” and “the man whom the authors of the Bible refer to as ‘Jonah.’” Kripke is aware of the possibility of this sort of response and tries to counter it, but his counterarguments are not convincing. First, he places much weight on a danger of vicious circularity that he sees in invoking descriptions that themselves employ the notion of reference in this way. However, vicious circularity would only arise here if the claim were that *all* (clusters of) relevant descriptions were of this sort, or that *all* (clusters of) descriptions relevant to some particular name that succeeds in referring were of this sort, whereas a sensible version of the response in question can easily avoid making or implying any such claim, while still leaving a large role for this sort of description, and in particular a large enough role to answer argument (ii) effectively. Second, Kripke objects that the sort of parasitism in the use of definite descriptions that would often be involved according to such an account – e.g., Smith's taking “Fido” to mean the creature Jones refers to as “Fido,” while Jones in turn takes it to mean the content of some other definite description – carries with it a possibility that, unbeknownst to them, the people in question may fail to refer to any object at all – e.g., if the vicious-circularity scenario is realized, Jones's definite description happening to be “the creature Smith refers to as ‘Fido.’” But surely, it is no duty of a correct account of proper names to exclude such a possibility; on the contrary, any account that *did not* make room for the possibility that people might unknowingly be using a proper name that failed to refer for reasons such as this would ipso facto be unacceptable. Third, Kripke focuses on a specific version of this idea of parasitic reference by means of definite description that was championed by Strawson, and Kripke objects that it implies that the parasitic user of a proper name would have to be able to identify the person whose reference he intended to replicate and that this is an unrealistic requirement. But this is no more than an *ad hominem* point against Strawson, who just happens to put the general idea in terms of parasitism on a *particular individual's* reference. As two of the examples given earlier already illustrate, there is no reason why the parasitism in question could not instead be on the reference achieved by some vaguely specified general group (e.g., “most classical scholars”).

In sum, it looks as though a theory in the spirit of Frege's can well withstand Kripke's critique. On the other hand, his critique does help to bring out the fact that certain closer specifications of such a theory may be necessary: in particular (a) an identification of the senses of proper names with (clusters of) *rigid* definite descriptions and (b) an assignment of an important role among the relevant definite descriptions to the sort of parasitic description just discussed.

- (ii) In *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884) Frege famously espouses a principle “never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a sentence/proposition” (this is sometimes known as the *context principle*). As Hans Sluga points out, this principle was not entirely new with Frege; versions of it already occur in Kant (who was probably its original source), Gruppe, Trendelenburg, Lotze, and (one might also add) Humboldt. However, its exact meaning in Frege is by no means transparent. In particular, he seems to have at least two different rationales for it, which lend it two different meanings: (a) According to one rationale, it is the fundamental function of language, and a function on which all linguistic meaning (i.e., what Frege will eventually distinguish as “sense”) consequently depends, to state *truths*; the smallest linguistic unit that can state a truth is the sentence/proposition; and word-meanings therefore consist in words’ contributions to the truth-conditions of the many sentences/propositions in which they can occur. (b) According to another rationale, found in the essay *On the Law of Inertia* (1885), terms such as “mass” and “force” only receive their senses from the law of inertia, and moreover it is a mistake to consider this law and the other laws of motion “in separation from one another” because they “have a meaning only as a whole.” Here the point seems to be the quite different one that a commitment to the truth of a certain set of sentences/propositions in which a word occurs (and, by implication, to the falsehood of another set) is internal to its meaning. These two different rationales and meanings of the context principle may be compatible, but they are quite distinct. Be this as it may, versions of the context principle would subsequently play central roles in Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language (both early and late), as well as in much other twentieth-century philosophy of language.
- (iii) Frege insists that genuine concepts must have *sharp boundaries*, that is, that every object must determinately either instantiate them or not. His reason for this insistence is similar to his reason for outlawing empty names in an ideal language, namely, that a language that fails to conform to it will contain sentences that are neither true nor false and will therefore also fail to conform to logical laws such as the law of bivalence or excluded middle. This insistence would later be subjected to a sustained attack by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).
- (iv) Frege normally holds that thoughts and senses are of their very nature such that they can be *shared* by different people (this constituting for him one of the main features that distinguish thoughts and senses from mere ideas or coloring). However, in his late paper *The Thought* he makes a point that conflicts with that principle: he argues that when I think or speak about myself for my own purposes (i.e., rather than for purposes of communicating with others) the sense of “I” is given by “a special and primitive way” in which I am presented to myself but “to no-one else,” and that it is only when I need to communicate with others, and therefore need to use a sense that they can grasp as well, that I switch to a sense for “I” that we can all grasp, such as “he who is speaking to you at this moment.” This strange theory was probably the main catalyst and target for Wittgenstein’s “private language argument” in the *Philosophical Investigations*, which can thus be seen as, in effect, defending Frege’s normal insistence on the sharability of all senses against this incompatible theory.

## CONCLUSION

Following its establishment by Herder and Hamann in the eighteenth century, the philosophy of language continued to flourish in the nineteenth century and has done so ever since. As we have seen, the Herder-Hamann tradition from which it was born strongly influenced its subsequent forms. Moreover, having drifted some distance from the hearth of that tradition's principles during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – especially in Nietzsche, Mauthner, Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein – it more recently circled around into renewed proximity to them with the later Wittgenstein.

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## THE EMERGENCE OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES FROM THE MORAL SCIENCES

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As edifying as the aims of the moral sciences may have been, their scientific status was often held to be deficient. Thus David Hume wrote in 1748 in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that the “great advantage of the mathematical sciences above the moral consists in this, that the ideas of the former, being sensible, are always clear and determinate....”<sup>1</sup> Moral ideas like freedom are often obscure and ambiguous. Thus two people agreeing that freedom is a good thing may have very different interpretations of what the term means and what kind of behavior exhibits it. Accordingly, Hume argues that moral reasoning is not in a position to ascertain determinate relations of ideas as are the mathematical sciences. Being about matters of fact and our sentiments toward them, the moral sciences cannot be demonstrative and are merely “experimental,” by which he means that they arrive at “general maxims from a comparison of particular instances.”<sup>2</sup> Moral reasoning cannot expect to arrive at the kind of certainty and universal agreement that the mathematical sciences can produce. Moral certainty is probabilistic at best. According to Hume, “morals and criticism are not so properly objects of the understanding as of taste and sentiment.”<sup>3</sup>

Although Immanuel Kant does not accept Hume’s claim that moral truths are based on subjective sentiments about matters of fact, he does distinguish between logical and moral certainty. Knowledge of the understanding can be said to possess a logical certainty that makes it universally valid for all finite intellects. There are beliefs, however, such as the religious belief in God’s existence, that possess a mere moral certainty according to Kant. Thus I should not say, “*It is* morally certain that there is a God,” but rather, “*I am* morally certain.”<sup>4</sup> Moral certainty is merely subjective; the reason that it cannot be universalized is not

<sup>1</sup> David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 60.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, *Principles of Morals*, in *Enquiries*, 174.

<sup>3</sup> Hume, *Human Understanding*, in *Enquiries*, 165.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A829/B857.

that it is probabilistic or based on the observation of moral customs, but that it reflects a rational conviction rooted in an individual's moral disposition. In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), however, Kant introduces a third alternative between the objective universality of logical certainty and the subjective holding something to be true of moral certainty. This is the mode of assent that is involved in reflective judgments such as those of taste, which are valid "for us (human beings as such)."<sup>5</sup> Reflective judgments can be said to be normatively exemplary for human beings and appeal to a sense of the communal that falls somewhere between objective knowledge and private conviction. It is this sphere of reflective intersubjectivity that is valid for us human beings that could be said to predelineate what we today call the human sciences. For Kant it meant adding a fourth question to the traditional three philosophical questions – What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? – namely, the anthropological question, What is man?

But the emergence of the human sciences from the moral sciences in the nineteenth century is more complicated than this preliminary sketch would indicate. It also needs to be understood in relation to efforts to dislodge psychology from its original home in metaphysics and redefine it in relation to anthropological research. Moreover, greater historical awareness led to an increased sensitivity to cultural differences. Thinkers like Johann Gottfried von Herder began to articulate national differences rooted in native languages. The stress on particular subjects held responsible by traditional moral philosophy came to be balanced with an ethical perspective that underscores the way individuals are embedded in a larger community. We will articulate this new dimension of human self-awareness by correlating the moral-ethical distinction with that between mind and spirit.

Michel Foucault also sees the new sciences of man as having been opened up by Kant's anthropological question, but for him they signal a sharp discontinuity with the classical representational *epistémé* and a shift to the more functionalist *epistémé* pursued by the newly emerging sciences of life, labor, and language.<sup>6</sup> Although Foucault does not accept the legitimacy of the human sciences, he accounts for their influence by what they derived from the advances in biology, economics, and philology that were being made as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth. Instead of providing a taxonomy of organic forms, the new biology of Georges Cuvier analyzed functional differentiations on the basis of an

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), §90; *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften. 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [hereafter Kant, Ak], 5:462.

<sup>6</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, ed. R. D. Laing (New York: Random House, 1970), chaps. 8 and 9.

underlying life energy. No longer regarding economics as the exchange of wealth, David Ricardo and Karl Marx examined the production of wealth through the forces released by labor and capital. Similarly, the study of language as practiced by Jacob Grimm and Franz Bopp was no longer subservient to representational discourse. Instead, different languages came to be regarded as having their distinctive organizational structures. In terms that Wilhelm von Humboldt could endorse, each language was thought to have its own energizing worldview.

If we examine the development of the human sciences in relation to the philosophical climate in which the actual reflections about them were formed, then we will find a path that has many more windings and fewer breaks than indicated by Foucault. We will plot a trajectory that takes account of the many debates about mind and spirit in the nineteenth century. The German idealists articulated the realm of *Geist* as the most comprehensive medium for speculating about human life. Whereas Kant defined spirit as the underlying principle of life, Georg W. F. Hegel approached spirit as a kind of surplus of life that can be objectified. Thus the way the life of man expresses itself in his works is the main part of a philosophical *Wissenschaft vom Geiste*<sup>7</sup> for Hegel that we can translate literally as “science of spirit.” We will trace how this is gradually transformed into a pluralistic and more empirical theory of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences or studies) in the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey.

The plural term *Geisteswissenschaften* is often thought to have its first occurrence in 1849 as the translation of “moral sciences” in Schiel’s translation of John Stuart Mill’s *System of Logic*. A. Diemer has noted that in 1847 Ernst Calinich refers to the *Geisteswissenschaften* in his *Philosophische Propädeutik*.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the historian Johann Gustav Droysen already used the term in 1843 in the preface to the second volume of his *Geschichte des Hellenismus*.<sup>9</sup>

E. Behler claims that Friedrich von Schlegel may have been the first to use the singular term *Geisteswissenschaft* in 1822.<sup>10</sup> However, Behler acknowledges

<sup>7</sup> George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), *Dritter Teil: Die Philosophie des Geistes*, in *Werke: Theorieverkausgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970–) [hereafter Hegel, *Werke*], 10:14–15, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ernst Adolf Edward Calinich, *Philosophische Propädeutik für Gymnasien, Realschulen und höhere Bildungsanstalten sowie zum Selbstunterrichte* (Dresden: Adler & Dietz, 1847), 1. Also, see Alwin Diemer, “Die Differenzierung der Wissenschaften in die Natur- und die Geisteswissenschaften und die Begründung der Geisteswissenschaften als Wissenschaft,” in *Studien zur Wissenschaftstheorie* (Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1968), 187.

<sup>9</sup> See Rudolf Makkreel, *Dilthey, Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 36. This 1843 Preface has been reprinted as a supplement to Droysen’s *Grundriss der Historik*, ed. Erich Rothacker (Halle an der Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1925). The term *Geisteswissenschaften* occurs on p. 97 of this edition. See also Rothacker’s *Logik und Systematik der Geisteswissenschaften* (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1948) for a general treatment of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and their sources.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich von Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, eds. Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett, and Hans Eichner (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–) [hereafter Schlegel, KA], 18:xxviii.



that the term was used as a synonym for *Idealismus*, so that it clearly designates a distinctive philosophically charged science. More recently, U. Dierse has pointed out that the Romantic natural philosopher Lorenz Oken already used the plural *Geisteswissenschaften* in 1817. He distinguishes them from *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences) as well as from *Sinneswissenschaften* (sciences of sense) such as grammar, philology, and aesthetics.<sup>11</sup> Oken's list of *Geisteswissenschaften* is quite extensive and unusual. It includes, among others, the study of mathematics, logic, ethics, religion, government, justice, taxation, ethnology, mythology, history, warfare, and geography. However, all the "general" or truly scientific *Geisteswissenschaften* (mathematics, logic, ethics, and religion) are still part of philosophy. The other disciplines subsumed under them, starting with government, only provide "particulars" relevant to the administration of political states.<sup>12</sup> Conceptually, Oken's *Geisteswissenschaften* are not yet pluralistic. We obtain the first inklings of that in Droysen when he speaks of their "wild and unsettled nature."<sup>13</sup>

Like Oken, Calinich characterizes the *Geisteswissenschaften* as philosophical sciences, but he is willing to include among its general branches not only morality and religion, but also the study of psychology, art, and law. Most importantly, he insists that the *Geisteswissenschaften* should employ the same complex of methods as the *Naturwissenschaften*, which brings him close to Mill and most clearly sets his usage apart from the term *Geistwissenschaft* by Hegelians and the term *Geisteswissenschaft* by Schlegel. Empirical methods only become relevant to the plural usage of *Geisteswissenschaften* established by Calinich and Dilthey. Once the *Geisteswissenschaften* have been liberated from an idealistic conception of *Geist*, the question becomes whether their empirical methods should primarily follow those of the natural sciences, as Mill asserts in his theory of the moral sciences, or whether they should attempt to develop distinctive methods, as will be argued by Dilthey.

#### THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES – FROM KANT TO HEGEL AND MARX

Whereas the term "moral science" seems more obviously normative than the term "human science," the opposite may in fact be true. Adam Ferguson complains of the tendency of many to regard the moral sciences as a theory of mind. Even a treatise such as James Beattie's *Elements of Moral Science* (London, 1790), which

<sup>11</sup> Ulrich Dierse, "Das Begriffspaar Naturwissenschaften–Geisteswissenschaften bis zu Dilthey," in *Kultur verstehen: Zur Geschichte und Theorie der Geisteswissenschaften*, eds. Gudrun Kühne–Bertram, Hans–Ulrich Lessing, and Volker Steenblock (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 76n11.

<sup>12</sup> See Lorenz Oken, *Isis oder Enzyklopädische Zeitung* (Jena, 1817), inside cover facing 385–6.

<sup>13</sup> Droysen, *Grundriss der Historik*, 97.

focuses on our moral duties and political rights, does so by studying our emotions and faculties, including the moral faculty of “conscience.” More often than not, the moral sciences content themselves with the study of motivations and principles of human conduct. They provide a primarily psychological analysis of human behavior. This certainly applies to how Hume and Mill treat the moral sciences.

To the extent that German theories of the *Geisteswissenschaften* or human sciences emerge from an idealistic background, normative issues loom larger there. We can see this already in how Kant weans his anthropology away from naturalistic models. Although Kant does not make an explicit distinction between natural and human sciences, he makes a distinction between two modes of doing philosophy that has a similar effect. One finds this distinction at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and near the beginning of his published lectures on logic. It is the distinction between philosophy as “a scholastic or academic concept (*Schulbegriff*)” and philosophy as a “worldly or cosmopolitan concept (*Weltbegriff*).”<sup>14</sup> Kant claims that before him philosophy has only been done in a scholastic manner – it has striven merely for “speculative knowledge (*Wissen*).”<sup>15</sup> Its true task must be worldly, that is, to strive for the wisdom to judge the worth of what can be cognized for the essential ends of human reason. Whereas scholastic philosophy is of theoretical interest to the learned and their “*Wissbegierde* (greed for knowledge),”<sup>16</sup> cosmopolitan philosophy is of practical interest to all mankind. Pragmatic anthropology, as Kant conceives it, contributes to this worldly kind of philosophy. Pragmatic anthropology is not concerned to know human beings as part of nature – what has been made of them – but to cognize what they can make of themselves in the human world. Accordingly, we see that anthropology will not be a universally valid (*allgemeingültige*) science with its claims to be a priori and mathematical in form, but what Kant now calls a “commonly useful (*gemeinnützige*) science,”<sup>17</sup> which allows us to cope with our world in prudential and practical terms.

Anthropology as Kant defines it is not an academic or scholarly discipline, but a pragmatic worldly endeavor. It is not aimed at a purely theoretical understanding of the psyche based on inner sense, as psychology is, but at the full human being’s proper orientation to the world through common sense. Its concern is to provide a reflective assessment of human life.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A838/B866; *Logik*, Kant, Ak 9:24.

<sup>15</sup> *Logik*, Kant, Ak 9:24.

<sup>16</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A855/B883.

<sup>17</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 5; Kant, Ak 7:122.

<sup>18</sup> In his insightful study of the human sciences and their background, *Zwischen Wissenschaftsanspruch und Orientierungsbedürfnis: Zu Grundlage und Wandel der Geisteswissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), Gunter Scholtz sees the *Geisteswissenschaften* as caught between the goal to

Whereas Kant's theoretical subject of understanding adopts a kind of view from nowhere on nature, the subject of anthropological reflection is situated amid the world as the sphere of action. There is a complementarity between these two subjects. The former is concerned with scientific observation and constructs nature in accordance with universal laws; the latter is concerned to orient itself in its sphere of action and instead appeals to "a topics of commonplaces."<sup>19</sup> The theoretical subject surveys the world discursively, allowing its phenomena to appear successively or stepwise so that they can be properly determined. To say that the human subjects of anthropological reflection, by contrast, are situated in their worldly surroundings means that they possess a direct, but less determinate, sense of the whole. Kant's anthropology supplements our discursive scientific understanding of the successive parts of the world with a topological outline of the whole for pragmatic purposes.

What Kant promises at the beginning of his anthropology is not an exhaustive description of the human world, but "an exhaustive account of the headings under which we can bring the practical human qualities we observe."<sup>20</sup> His aim is not psychological description, but normative characterization. To characterize is to go beyond description by pointing to more than what is directly given. With reference to life, Kant writes that "the character of a living being is what enables us to know its final determination in advance."<sup>21</sup> Characterization allows us to be prepared for the future and is thus more pragmatic than mere description. This task of characterization, which is "to discern man's inner self from his exterior,"<sup>22</sup> can only be approximated. There is no direct psychological introspective path to human knowledge. We must cognize ourselves indirectly by interpreting our expressions.

Kant is realistic enough to recognize that few if any individuals have attained his moral ideal of character. He thus goes on to deal with the physiological counterpart of characterization, namely, physiognomy: "the art of detecting someone's inner life by means of certain external signs involuntarily given."<sup>23</sup> Whereas the moral ideal of the *ars characteristica* is to interpret people by their voluntary expressions, the physiognomic equivalent involves interpreting them by their involuntary expressions.

Kant conceived of his pragmatic anthropology as an advance on psychology because it suspends the question whether individual souls are immortal. Hegel,

make scientific claims and the need to orient human behavior. But the more scientific they become, the more likely they are to become useless in guiding life. See 38.

<sup>19</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 58; Kant, Ak 7:184.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 5; Kant, Ak 7:121–2.

<sup>21</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 189; Kant, Ak 7:329.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 149; Kant, Ak 7:283.

<sup>23</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 161; Kant, Ak 7:297.

by contrast, treats anthropology as a more elementary science because it considers the nature of the soul in general as the background for conceiving the genesis of man. Rather than define man in terms of his teleological *Bestimmung* in the Fichtean sense of a vocation, Hegel adopts a more gradual, Herderian approach. The emergence of human self-awareness is elaborately worked out in Hegel's discussions of subjective, objective, and absolute spirit in the *Enzyklopadie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830).

What distinguishes anthropology as the first stage of Hegel's subjective spirit is that it regards the soul as an "immaterial" manifestation of nature.<sup>24</sup> The initial determination of soul is of "an immediate, unconscious totality,"<sup>25</sup> which constitutes the abstract universality of the world-soul. At this elementary level, we can speak of the human soul as a mode of animal life, and the initial anthropological differentiations that reveal themselves are merely those of sex, race, and such natural endowments as talent and genius.

Instead of showing what man can make of himself through his will, Hegel's anthropology shows what nature begins to make of him – here spirit discloses itself as a mere mode of life. Individuality can only come to the fore as "the awakening of the soul, which first confronts its self-absorbed natural life as a natural determinateness."<sup>26</sup> What awakens the soul from its natural sleep is sensation. Hegel claims that "the soul is implicitly a reflected totality of sensing,"<sup>27</sup> which also has the capacity to feel itself from within. To the extent that the soul can feel itself, it can be said to arrive at an in-itself or implicit "selfhood (*Selbstischkeit*),"<sup>28</sup> but not yet a for-itself or explicit self-consciousness.

The felt soul is compared to a monad that unconsciously reflects all other souls. Subjective spirit does not become explicitly conscious until it passes from its natural *anthropological* stage to its *phenomenological* stage. Consciousness comes to the fore in the phenomenology of spirit as the stage in which spirit recognizes itself as spiritual. Here the selfhood of the monadic soul becomes the conscious ego as explicitly related to itself and the other. Consciousness moves beyond sense and feeling to perceive objects that can be understood in terms of universal laws. To the extent that consciousness also has itself as its object it becomes self-consciousness. According to Hegel, "self-consciousness in its immediacy is *singular*, and constitutes *desire*."<sup>29</sup> It is certain of itself but still searches for the truth outside itself in objects. It is in this sphere of the phenomenology of consciousness

<sup>24</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, ed. and trans. M. J. Petry, 3 vols. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978), §389 2:3; Hegel, *Werke* 10:43.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, §440 3:81; Hegel, *Werke* 10:231.

<sup>26</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, §398 2:127; Hegel, *Werke* 10:87.

<sup>27</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, §402 2:203; Hegel, *Werke* 10:117.

<sup>28</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, §402 2:203; Hegel, *Werke* 10:117.

<sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, §426 3:43; Hegel, *Werke* 10:215.

that the mastery-servitude struggle also asserts itself as part of the process of seeking re-cognition from others.

The truth of subjective spirit finally comes into being in its *psychological* stage, which gathers the abstract felt totality of the soul and the universal certainty of self-consciousness into knowledge of a “substantial totality, which is neither subjective nor objective.”<sup>30</sup> Psychology is the study of free spirit, that is, spirit as elevated “above nature... above involvement with a general external object, above material being in general.”<sup>31</sup> It does not provide descriptions of particular psychic contents but transforms the traditional human faculties into spiritual capacities in the most general sense of intuiting, representing, recollecting, desiring, and willing. Psychology as the dialectical culmination of subjective spirit is thus hardly the introspective psychology that Kant tried to overcome. It frees spirit of its natural determinations, only to prepare it to objectify itself culturally and historically.

It is definitive of spirit, as distinct from consciousness, to be embodied. Subjective spirit necessarily becomes objective spirit – it must articulate itself objectively. The freedom of spirit that was explicated in psychology as free will must be actualized publicly. The free private ego becomes a person in the legal sense by being able to make claims on external things and over against others. These claims are more fully explicated in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* (1821) – a philosophical theory of law. The initial abstract mode of embodiment of freedom is the right of possession. As a person, I possess my life and my body and can appropriate things that have no will of their own as my property.<sup>32</sup> A thing can become my property by my taking possession of it, either by directly grasping it, by forming it, or by marking it as mine.<sup>33</sup> Hegel adds that “to impose a form on a thing is the mode of taking possession most in conformity with the Idea [of right] to the extent that it implies a union of subject and object.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, in cultivating land, I improve it. Just as essential to the nature of property as appropriating it is the capacity to yield it to other persons. Hegel writes that “the reason I can alienate my property is that it is mine only insofar as I put my will into it.”<sup>35</sup> There are certain aspects of my life that I can never remove my will from, but there are products of mind that “I can alienate to someone else,”<sup>36</sup> at least partially. For example, my thoughts can be published in books and thus be made useful to others.

<sup>30</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, §440 3:79; Hegel, *Werke* 10:229.

<sup>31</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, §440 3:79; Hegel, *Werke* 10:230.

<sup>32</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1952; Frome: D. R. Hillman, 1965), §47; Hegel, *Werke* 7:110–11.

<sup>33</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§53–4, 46; Hegel, *Werke* 7:117–19.

<sup>34</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §56, 47; Hegel, *Werke* 7:121.

<sup>35</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §65, 52; Hegel, *Werke* 7:140.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §67, 54; Hegel, *Werke* 7:144–5.

To protect against the total alienation of mental property, Hegel endorses copyright laws. Here we move from property to contract law, that is, the mediation of personal property. In contract law, persons recognize each other as property owners. Through a contract I can “hold property not merely by means of a thing and my subjective will, but by means of another person’s will as well and so hold it in virtue of my participation in a common will.”<sup>37</sup> The idea of right as expressed in property and contract law subjects persons to coercion and crime, for “it is only the will existent in an object that can suffer injury.”<sup>38</sup>

The next stage of objective spirit moves from the abstract legal rights of the person to the morality of the subject. Property, like the body, constitutes a natural extension of the human being and is thus vulnerable to external injury. In the moral subject, the will is reflected back into itself and becomes self-determining. Yet it too is abstract and insufficient. Whereas the rights of persons seem to point back to anthropology – a natural sphere of human conflicts and the legal regulation of crime – the morality of subjects seems to place us back into the sphere of consciousness. To the extent that morality is conceived in the Kantian manner it is indeed too subjective for Hegel. Nevertheless, he finds himself compelled to incorporate morality as a way of moving from the idea of right to the idea of the good. Morality develops its own conception of objectivity by universalizing maxims and seeks self-certainty in conscience. Although conscience is subjective, it provides the first glimpse of absolute spirit. Or as Hegel puts it: “True conscience is the disposition to will what is absolutely good.”<sup>39</sup> But being formal and abstract, conscience is readily perverted and points to the need for the final stage of objective spirit in which the moral is transformed into the ethical.

Ethical life articulates the idea of the good by giving it substantial shapes. Its phases are objectified in the life of the family, in civil society, and in the constitution of the state. The importance of family and its basis in marriage is that here “personality” or immediate exclusive individuality surrenders itself for membership in some mediated ethical bond. A family is a substantial ethical union. Although marriages begin with contracts, they serve to overcome the standpoint of the contract.<sup>40</sup> But the dialectic of objective spirit negates more than the contractual relationship. Families are subject to dissolution over time as children “come of age” and “become persons in the eyes of the law.”<sup>41</sup> This process of the dissolution of the ethical reality of the family engenders a “world of ethical appearance – civil society.”<sup>42</sup> Civil society is considered a system in which each

<sup>37</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §71, 57; Hegel, *Werke* 7:152.

<sup>38</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §96, 68; Hegel, *Werke* 7:183.

<sup>39</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §137, 90; Hegel, *Werke* 7:254.

<sup>40</sup> See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §163, 112; Hegel, *Werke* 7:313.

<sup>41</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §177, 118; Hegel, *Werke* 7:330.

<sup>42</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §181, 122; Hegel, *Werke* 7:338.

person works for the satisfaction of his own wants, but by means of cooperation with others. In this social regulation of needs and work, persons become burghers and for the first time “we have before us ... the composite idea which we call ‘human being (*Mensch*).’”<sup>43</sup> As needs become universalized, they become interdependent and work is subjected to an abstract process of division in which each step becomes increasingly mechanical. On this basis, Hegel’s philosophy of objective spirit makes room for the science of political economy to explicate the class divisions that constitute modern civil society. These dialectical descriptions are at the same time the basis for a critique of civil society that also provides the background for Marx’s dialectical materialism. Whereas Hegel finds the realization of objective spirit in the state, Marx will demand that the state be overcome.

According to Hegel, once we move from the study of civil society to its actualization in the nation-state we realize that the state is the true ground of the earlier phases of objective spirit. The state for Hegel is more than just the subject matter of political theory. It is the spiritual substance in which the ethical will manifests itself and in which freedom is universalized. “Since the state is spirit objectified, it is only as one of its members that the individual himself has objectivity, genuine individuality, and an ethical life.”<sup>44</sup> Hegel sees the state as more than an administrative organization of individuals, namely, as the domain in which world-history plays itself out. World-history involves the realization of freedom from primitive forms of state in which only the sovereign is free, to the forms where some are free, to a final state in which all are free. When all can participate in the state it takes on an ethical significance that only philosophy as the science of absolute spirit can articulate in full.

The nation-state embodies Hegel’s ideal of a community in which primitive customs and religious and cultural institutions work to bind human beings into a spiritual whole. Religion is so essential to being a citizen of a state that Hegel goes so far as to claim that the state is “the march of God in the world.”<sup>45</sup> The centrality of religion is also confirmed by Hegel’s explication of absolute spirit, according to which religion transforms the particular intuitive imagery of the arts into general imaginative representations before philosophy grasps them more concretely through its concepts.

Marx inherited Hegel’s contempt for the individualism of civil society but does not find the solution in religious and philosophical communion with the absolute. Community is to be found not by restoring the spiritual sources of our history, but in emancipating ourselves from the material sources of human

<sup>43</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §190, 127; Hegel, *Werke* 7:348.

<sup>44</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258, 156; Hegel, *Werke* 7:399.

<sup>45</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258, 279; Hegel, *Werke* 7:403.

alienation. We saw how Hegel's philosophy of spirit defines human progress in terms of leaving our natural existence behind. Accordingly, the science of human spirit involves the negation of the natural sciences. For Marx, man will always be a natural being, but he must aim at becoming a human natural being. Our humanity lies not in negating our nature, but in expanding it. A mere natural being has a particular nature; a human rational being is a *species-being* who finds fulfillment through economic cooperation with other human beings.

For Hegel, matter has its nature outside itself and spirit within itself. Marx counters that whereas a mere natural being has its essence outside itself without knowing it, a human natural being knows that its essence is self-transcending without being transcendent in any metaphysical sense. In contrast to Hegel, who tried to illuminate human history by tracing a dialectical progression from anthropological man to philosophical humanity, Marx rejects a philosophical solution to the understanding of history. In his "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy" (1844), he praises Feuerbach, who coined the term "species-being," for showing that "philosophy is nothing more than religion brought into thought and that it is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of human alienation."<sup>46</sup> Marx's dialectical materialism requires the dissolution of philosophy into the social sciences rooted in anthropology and economics. There is no basis for splitting off a science of spirit from the sciences of nature. Nature must be humanized and man naturalized.

Hegel's world-history is essentially self-centering or centripetal and finds its spiritual home in nation-states. Marx's world-history is more centrifugal and projects the negation of the political power structures of nation-states. Only through international revolutionary means can the class divisions of nation-states be overcome for the sake of a true communism.

#### PHILOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL INQUIRY – FROM MÖSER TO NIETZSCHE

Kant's normative characterization of the telos of human cultivation, Hegel's dialectical explication of the objective shapes of human spirit, and Marx's efforts to provide economic explanations of social progress establish a general schematic background for understanding many other, more specific developments in the human sciences, which we will now consider. They all manifest an increasing sensitivity concerning the importance of history for human understanding. Eighteenth-century England and France had already produced great historians

<sup>46</sup> Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. and trans. T. B. Bottomore (London: Watts, 1963), 197; *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, 1975) [hereafter Marx, MEGA].



who tended to conceive their subject matter in terms of the progress of science and culture. Over against their Enlightenment kind of universal history, there developed a historical school in Germany that rooted historical understanding in local conditions. Especially important here is the work of Justus Möser, who “replaced the structureless account of the culture of an age, as offered by Voltaire, Hume, Robertson and Gibbon, with the idea of an inner purposive system that connects the various expressions of human existence in an epoch.”<sup>47</sup> Like Herder, Möser stressed the indigenous qualities of local cultures. Each culture and epoch bears its standard within itself and should not be measured by some general standard. Another important representative of the historical school was the jurist Friedrich Karl von Savigny, who replaced the traditional theory of natural law grounded in reason with a view of laws as developing from the local customs of peoples. Rather than treat the law as an autonomous science, it should, like language and manners, be considered as one aspect of the social life of a nation and its development. Savigny’s views prepared the ground for sociological conceptions of law. Every manifestation of a national culture is integrally related to its distinctive context.

Central to the new way of conceiving history is the organizational principle of inner connectedness. Wilhelm von Humboldt speaks in his 1821 essay “Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers” of the need to explicate the forces of history from within. That which is active in history is also that which moves the inner nature of human beings.<sup>48</sup> Instead of conceiving history merely in terms of an initial cause or a final telos, it should be understood in terms of the ideational forces at work in the very processes of historical development. Humboldt suggests a way of reconciling the contextuality of historicism and the universality of idealism by treating ideas as pervading every part of world history and yet transcending them all. Ideas assert themselves both as immanent tendencies and as exertions of force that exceed their circumstances. Leopold Ranke’s historical researches were able to exhibit some of these ideas. What was an invisible ideational nexus for Humboldt is given an intuitive realization in Ranke. Ideational tendencies become moral energies embodied in great personalities. By locating the course of empirical history within the perspective of the divine governance of the world, the historian can point to “God’s thoughts in the world.” Ranke’s ideal of writing history as it actually happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) claims an

<sup>47</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, vol. 4 of *Selected Works*, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 373; Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914–) [hereafter Dilthey, GS], 3:256.

<sup>48</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ausgewählte philosophische Schriften* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1910), 91.

objectivity for the historian – it demands his self-effacement in favor of a neutral divine perspective that is purely contemplative.

Droysen's *Historik*, published in 1868, rejected such an ideal of objectivity as a form of eunuchism. History is an ethical realm of freedom that is not reducible to the laws of nature. As such, history cannot be explained but must be understood on its own ethical terms. Here we find a metaphysical basis for establishing a methodical distinction between the natural sciences as explanative and the historical or human sciences as aiming at understanding. This distinction would subsequently be refined by Dilthey and given an epistemological justification.

The reflections on history by Droysen and Dilthey have a common background in the lectures of August Wilhelm Boeckh on philology and hermeneutics delivered in Berlin for more than forty years until he retired in 1865. But Boeckh's influence on Droysen is much more evident because both of them still worked largely within the encyclopedic framework of spirit established by Hegel. Boeckh's lectures were entitled *Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften*; Droysen's *Historik* had the parallel subtitle *Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte*. To do justice to Dilthey's position will require reference to more disparate sources, and we will find his account of the historical world to be less uniform in nature.

For Boeckh, philology is not just the study of antiquity or the study of language.<sup>49</sup> The task of philology is the understanding of all that has been produced by the human spirit, or, in his unique phrase, "the re-cognition of past cognition (*das Erkennen des Erkannten*)."<sup>50</sup> The methodological recognition of what has already been cognized constitutes understanding. Boeckh claims that the only correct method for attaining understanding is "cyclical, in which everything leads back to the center and proceeds in all directions from this center toward the periphery."<sup>51</sup> Philology and its skillful efforts to understand human cultures and their history must proceed encyclopedically – that is, it should "first study exactly a single historical period and from it gradually branch out in all directions."<sup>52</sup> Although philology must be encyclopedic in content, its formal basis lies in hermeneutics, which is about "absolute understanding," and criticism, which is

<sup>49</sup> Gunter Scholtz points to the traditional trivium of the liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics) as one of the sources of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. This is clearly the background for Boeckh's language-based approach to the study of history. But equally important is the ethical tradition that Scholtz also identifies and refers back to Aristotle. See Scholtz, *Zwischen Wissenschaftsanspruch und Orientierungsbedürfnis*, 19–27.

<sup>50</sup> August Wilhelm Boeckh, *Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften*, ed. Ernst Bratuscheck and Rudolf Klusmann (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1886), 13.

<sup>51</sup> Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, ed. and trans. John Paul Pritchard (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 33.

<sup>52</sup> Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, 32.

about “relative understanding,” or how things are to be judged in relation to each other or “with reference to an ideal.”<sup>53</sup>

This reference to an ideal in criticism means that philological inquiry is never fully separated from philosophy. Accordingly, Boeckh writes “that philology is really nothing else than the expression in history of that which ethics presents in general as the law of behavior.”<sup>54</sup> Boeckh’s hermeneutics elaborates Schleiermacher’s basic distinction between grammatical and psychological interpretation in terms of two modes of objective interpretation (grammatical and historical) and two modes of subjective interpretation (individual and generic). Not separating what is objectively in a work from the author’s subjective knowledge of the work is to fall into allegorical explanation, which is the mistake of understanding too much. An important hermeneutic canon is that “nothing is to be explained in such a way that no contemporaries could have understood it.”<sup>55</sup> Many methodological distinctions are introduced for interpretation and criticism so that misunderstanding and vicious circles can be prevented. Boeckh expresses the confidence that hermeneutics and criticism will allow historians to arrive inductively at the laws of historical development that will confirm philosophical speculations about the end of history.<sup>56</sup> While his philology “lays claim to being a science, it is at the same time an art”<sup>57</sup> to the extent that it reconstructs the past. Finally, it is speculative in aiming at the “understanding of the past as a whole.”<sup>58</sup>

Droysen’s theory of history (*Historik*) is more complex and places philological givens in a more clearly articulated context of historical materials. He defines the task of the historian as the *understanding* of the force of the past by means of *inquiry* into the materials it has produced. These historical materials are either remains (*Überreste*), sources (*Quellen*), or monuments (*Denkmäler*).<sup>59</sup> The “remains” of the past include still-extant physical products such as implements, buildings, and statues. They also encompass institutional survivals such as customs and laws, ideational results such as letters and books, as well as business papers and contracts. By “sources” Droysen means representations of what happened that can be passed on to the consciousness and memory of subsequent generations. They are what continues to live on and change with time and can constitute a tradition that is not fully written down. The sources for classical Greece include

<sup>53</sup> Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, 71.

<sup>56</sup> Boeckh, *Enzyklopädie und Methodologie*, 345–6.

<sup>57</sup> Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, 21.

<sup>58</sup> Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik: Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1943), 37–8.

not only contemporary accounts, but also what subsequent historians and thinkers have claimed about the Greeks. Sources always shed a “polarizing light”<sup>60</sup> on the past. Remains are much more certain, but they are mere “contingent and scattered fragments.”<sup>61</sup>

The third mode of historical materials are “monuments,” which are characterized as both remains and sources. Monuments are remains that were produced at least in part with the purpose of becoming sources. A public statue commissioned to celebrate a political leader is an objective product meant to be preserved and influence the representations of future generations.

Criticism, for Droysen, does not search for “authentic historical facts” à la Ranke but should seek to determine “in what relation the materials that are available to us stand to the acts of will of which they bear witness.”<sup>62</sup> Whereas psychological interpretation attempts to reconstruct such acts of will, the full task of interpretation is to be able to see historical materials as part of the ethical spheres in which they are rooted and move. Either we observe in those materials the ethical conditions that helped shape what occurred up till then, or we attempt to discern progressive moments. The former designates the “ethical horizon” of an age, the latter its “movement.”<sup>63</sup> The movement of history consists of transforming states of affairs into thoughts of what they should be and then realizing them. In Hegelian terms, history becomes “the knowledge of humanity about itself, its self-certainty.”<sup>64</sup>

The final part of Droysen’s *Historik* is a topics, which locates the ways in which the results of historical research and understanding are to be presented. These forms of presentation should not be mere analogues of the literary genres of epic, lyric, and dramatic, as the historian and literary critic Georg Gervinus had suggested, but must be informed by the duality of what has been investigated.<sup>65</sup> Historical inquiry enriches the present from which it starts through clarification of its antecedents; it also enriches the past through the disclosure of its effects in the present. These two vectors should exhibit themselves in the modes of historical presentation. The first mode is “investigative” and proceeds in the direction of what is to be found. The second mode is “narrative” and presents events in their order of genesis. But there is not one simple way of letting the events speak for themselves. The narrative mode can be “pragmatic” if it appeals to forethought in relation to the convergence of forces or

<sup>60</sup> Droysen, *Historik*, 334.

<sup>61</sup> Droysen, *Historik*, 334.

<sup>62</sup> Droysen, *Historik*, 335–6.

<sup>63</sup> See Droysen, *Historik*, 343.

<sup>64</sup> Droysen, *Historik*, 358.

<sup>65</sup> Droysen, *Historik*, 359.

“monographic” if it shows how a historical configuration shapes itself. Narrative can also be “biographical” if action and suffering are delimited to one historical figure, and, finally, it can be “catastrophic” if it shows how conflicts among relatively legitimate powers and interests come to a head and are worked out. The third mode of historical presentation is “didactic” and shows the significance of history for the present. The fourth mode is “discussional” – it uses the past to help illuminate questions that the present has not yet decided – issues still under discussion.<sup>66</sup>

Droysen, like Boeckh, can be regarded as methodically elaborating the metaphysical endeavors of German idealism. Hegel expanded the Enlightenment concept of encyclopedic knowledge into a speculative system of human self-knowledge, and this ideal was explicated through the science of philology by Boeckh and the science of history by Droysen.

Friedrich Nietzsche was trained as a philologist but displays a more skeptical attitude toward history and what it can teach human beings about themselves. He starts his essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874) with the warning that too much historical knowledge will be counterproductive for life. Living well requires the capacity both to remember and to forget. Nietzsche regards the “historical sense” of his day as a kind of induced sleeplessness that inhibits decisive action. The person with historical sense sees the world as an infinite sea of becoming and will eventually drown in this Heraclitean flux. Such unlimited historical consciousness is contrasted to three more limited modes of historical consciousness that respond to three needs of life. These are enumerated as 1) the need to act and strive, 2) the need to preserve and revere, and 3) the need to obtain deliverance from suffering. A special type of history corresponds to each.

To the need to act there corresponds a *monumental history* that provides past models of great deeds. The Apollonian need to preserve finds its correlate in an *antiquarian history* that has the more modest goal of venerating one’s ancestral origins. Instead of inspiring powerful future-oriented deeds, as monumental history is supposed to, antiquarian history engenders a more modest contentment with one’s limited circumstances. Finally, to the Dionysian need to overcome one’s suffering creatively there corresponds a *critical history* that judges the past and condemns its “aberrations, passions, and errors,”<sup>67</sup> especially the ones that still affect us. This critical history is a way to combat what is undesirable in “our inborn

<sup>66</sup> See Droysen, *Historik*, 360–3.

<sup>67</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 76; Nietzsche, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980) [hereafter Nietzsche, KGW], 3, 1:266.

heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away.”<sup>68</sup>

Whereas antiquarian history allows one to accept one’s situation, both monumental and critical history involve a more active mode of evaluation – in the first case affirmatively, in the second negatively. Nietzsche attacks the historical sense of his contemporaries because it is not adequately judgmental or discerning and tends to tolerate too much from the past. The result is a cosmopolitan continuum of historical knowledge that does not serve our own life but makes us “a passive sounding-board”<sup>69</sup> for everything else.

This raises an issue that runs throughout many discussions about the aims of the human sciences. Should historians and anthropologists be content to understand what happened in a mere descriptive mode – that is, to sensitize their historical sense and trace the dialectical unfolding of spirit – or should they make judgments, characterizations, and evaluations? Here Nietzsche stands clearly on the side of judgment and critique. The historical sense is seen as encouraging a kind of relativism in which everything is indiscriminately interesting. What is to be cultivated instead is what Herman von Helmholtz called “judgments arrived at by psychological instinct”<sup>70</sup> or a feeling of tact (*Taktgefühl*).

Nietzsche fears that if history is conceived as a science of universal becoming, it will destroy the illusions we need to live a productive and creative life.<sup>71</sup> Nietzsche’s own counterproposal is that history be considered as an art that can create, not a cosmopolitan republic of letters à la Kant, but the more selective “republic of genius of which Schopenhauer once spoke.”<sup>72</sup> In this kind of history “one giant calls to another across the desert intervals of time and, undisturbed by the excited chattering dwarfs who creep about beneath them, the exalted spirit-dialogue goes on.... The goal of humanity cannot lie in its end but only in its highest exemplars.”<sup>73</sup>

We have seen Nietzsche downgrade the importance of the historical world-process as reconstructed by the historical sense. So why then did Nietzsche become interested in genealogy? One difference seems to be that the historical sense tends to run everything together, whereas genealogy as an extension

<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 76; Nietzsche, KGW 3, 1:266.

<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 90; Nietzsche, KGW 3, 1:284.

<sup>70</sup> Hermann von Helmholtz, “The Relation of the Natural Sciences to Science in General,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. Russell Kahl and trans. H. W. Eve (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 132. In this discourse of 1862, Helmholtz also attributes to the *Geisteswissenschaften* a kind of aesthetic induction that must content itself with particular judgments rather than the general laws produced by the “logical induction” of the natural sciences.

<sup>71</sup> See Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 95; Nietzsche, KGW 3, 1:291.

<sup>72</sup> Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 111; Nietzsche, KGW 3, 1:313.

<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 111; trans. rev.; Nietzsche, KGW 3, 1:313.

of critical history seeks to fragment our past. Genealogy is a critique meant to undermine the status of the conscious subject, the rational agent in history. A major thesis of the *Genealogy of Morals* (1887) is that moral values do not have a pristine birth or derive from some higher realm. Although we may now value selfless deeds as good, originally goodness was defined by the egoistic self-assertion of the strong and powerful, and badness by weakness. According to Nietzsche, “the beginnings of everything great on earth [were] soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time.”<sup>74</sup>

Nietzsche’s genealogy historicizes our moral values by dispersing their beginnings in various historical contexts. But genealogy is also used to go back to a *pre-history*. This archaeological direction is most clearly suggested in *The Gay Science* (1882), where Nietzsche writes, “Your judgment ‘this is right’ has a pre-history in your instincts, likes, dislikes, experiences, and lack of experiences.”<sup>75</sup> The appeal to a more basic level of instinctual life is part of a strategy to show that the history of consciousness is relatively recent and must be rooted in a prehistory of the body that cannot be conveniently relegated to the primitive past but is still very much with us.

It should be noted that this prehistory underlying our moral consciousness is not just physiological and factual but opens up speculative and interpretive questions about the will-to-power. Although Nietzsche the philologist rejects history as a science, his idea of a “gay science” suggests a way of combining the mere science that makes us “colder” with artistic and speculative insights that can warm our blood and heighten our joy in living.<sup>76</sup> In a strange way, Nietzsche still recalls Boeckh’s encyclopedic ideal of reconciling scientific method, artistic skill, and speculative insight – now stripped of any edifying intent.

#### IDEOLOGY, COMTE’S SOCIOLOGY, AND MILL’S LOGIC OF THE MORAL SCIENCES

When we move from Germany and return to the development of the moral and social sciences in France and England, we will find history approached with less concern for philological reverence and/or discernment. First of all, there are the reductive analyses of ideology that go back to Destutt de Tracy. He conceived *idéologie* as a *science des idées* that studies the origin and validity of ideas. This new discipline was inspired by Francis Bacon’s efforts to separate out false ideas

<sup>74</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1975), 65; Nietzsche, KGW 6, 2:316.

<sup>75</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 263–4; Nietzsche, KGW 5, 2:241.

<sup>76</sup> See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 85–6; Nietzsche, KGW 5, 2:57–8.

(idols) from true ideas, and its aim was to produce unprejudiced thought. Most of Bacon's idols were involuntary illusions produced by superstitions, affections, bad habits, or a confused use of language. To this epistemological critique of illusory ideas, the French Enlightenment added critique based on reflections about social conditions. Since it is in the interest of those in power to deceive others intentionally, conscious and complicit deceptions have to be added to the possible sources of error.

Being reform-minded, the ideologists were attacked by Napoleon as impractical visionaries. Ever since, and especially in Marx, "ideology" has become a pejorative term that denotes a set of ideas that claims to be universally valid but in reality represents the particular interests of a special class. The original intent of ideology was to expose illusory ideas and demystify them by appealing to reason. Subsequently, ideology came to be regarded as a practice of mystification that needs to be exposed by positive critique. In the final analysis, ideology encompasses not just unconscious illusions and conscious deceptions, but any reactionary mode of distortion produced by special economic, political, and religious interests.

Carried to its extreme, the critique of ideology led to the view that reason is never self-determining, but always the product of social conditions. From the perspectives of Humboldt, Boeckh, and Droysen, the autonomous development of rational ideas proposed by Hegel needed to be adapted to local conditions. But they would never think of limiting the validity of ideas to specific historical conditions. Such a reductive approach is what we obtain when we follow out ideological critique to the sociology of knowledge.

Auguste Comte, the founder of sociology, adds psychology to the scope of ideology. The belief in the soul as the domain for psychological introspection is for him just a by-product of traditional theology and metaphysics. In his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830), he revives a conception of intellectual progress first articulated by Robert Jacques Turgot. Here is how Comte reformulates Turgot's general law according to which all branches of human inquiry must pass through three stages: "each of our leading conceptions – each branch of our knowledge – passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive."<sup>77</sup> The theological fiction of an immortal soul and the metaphysical abstraction of cognitive faculties have allowed psychology to differentiate sharply between men and other animals. Psychologists have accordingly made the intellect the defining human property. But positive inquiry into the facts shows that intellect applies to other animals, just as animal instinct applies to human beings.

<sup>77</sup> Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, ed. and trans. Harriet Martineau (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1856), 25.



Comte is not content merely to rid psychology of its soul and its faculties; he also begins to challenge it as a mode of inquiry. Instead of describing the contents of human consciousness psychologically à la Hume or spiritually à la Hegel, he explains them scientifically as either manifestations of our physiological bodily states or influenced by social conditions. There are only six positive sciences for Comte: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology, and sociology. Therefore, psychology is not a proper science, and to place it between physiology and sociology would unnecessarily break the continuity between them. Indeed, to underscore the dependence of sociology on the other sciences that precede it, he calls it “social physics.” Just as there is no positive evidence according to Comte for the existence of a soul distinct from the body, so he finds no basis for the belief that introspection can provide a distinctive methodical approach for human self-knowledge or for any moral science.

John Stuart Mill was influenced by Comte’s positive philosophy but nevertheless stopped short of excluding psychology from his system of the moral sciences. Book 6 of Mill’s *System of Logic* (1843) is entitled “On the Logic of the Moral Sciences.” Logic is here used in the enlarged nineteenth-century sense that includes methodology. Like Comte, Mill argues for a continuity between the methods of the natural and moral sciences. To be sure, the moral sciences are less exact than most natural sciences because of the many initial conditions that need to be considered in explaining human action. Psychology is, according to Mill, not unlike the natural science of tidology. Tidology is a genuine science in that there are general laws that explain the ebb and flow of tides on the basis of attractive forces that link the Earth, Sun, and Moon. Yet the exact strength of tides is hard to predict because there are so many initial local conditions to take into account. The same is the case with our psychological states. Mental phenomena include thoughts, feelings, volitions, and sensations, and all are subject to causal laws. Although sensations have physiological causes, all other mental phenomena can best be understood in relation to mental antecedents. This is how Mill responds to Comte:

That every mental state has a nervous state for its immediate antecedent and proximate cause, though extremely probable, cannot hitherto be said to be proved in the conclusive manner in which this can be proved of sensations; and even if it were certain, yet every one must admit that we are wholly ignorant of the characteristics of these nervous states. . . . The successions, therefore, which obtain among mental phenomena do not admit of being deduced from the physiological laws of our nervous organization; and all real knowledge of them must continue, for a long time at least, if not always, to be sought in the direct study, by observation and experiment, of the mental successions themselves.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–91) [hereafter Mill, CW], 8:851.

Psychology is thus for Mill a science that mainly examines the laws according to which one mental state succeeds another. The first law of psychology is that any state of consciousness caused in us is capable of being reproduced in us, although with less intensity, without the presence of that cause. Thus, every sensation can be reproduced as a representation, or, to quote Hume, “every mental impression has its idea.”<sup>79</sup> With the generation of ideas or representations we obtain a relative independence from physiological determination. Ideas can be produced by other ideas according to laws of association. More generally, Mill claims that the laws of psychic life are “sometimes analogous to mechanical, but sometimes also to chemical laws.”<sup>80</sup> There is such a thing as mental chemistry in which simple ideas can no longer be recognized in the complex ideas that they generate. Instead of mechanically “composing” complex ideas, they chemically “coalesce” into them. Laws of causality, whether modeled on mechanical composition or on chemical coalescence, govern mental phenomena. Does this take away human freedom? Mill claims not. Causal necessity does not entail fatalism. Thus, “when we say that all human actions take place of necessity, we only mean they will certainly happen if nothing prevents.”<sup>81</sup> If we have swallowed poison, death is not inevitable if antidotes are applied. No single causal condition is immune from being countered. “Human actions are ... never (except in some cases of mania) ruled by any one motive with such absolute sway that there is no room for the influence of any other.”<sup>82</sup> Mill is content with a compatibilist conception of freedom that argues that causal necessity governs mental life without entailing inevitability.

The universal nature of the laws of psychology does not have as a consequence that we are all alike. There is a supplementary science of character formation, or ethology, that examines different types of human character. “Mankind have not one universal character, but there exist universal laws of the Formation of Character.”<sup>83</sup> The aim of ethology is to deduce from the general psychological laws, “combined with the general position of our species in the universe, what actual or possible combinations of circumstances are capable of promoting or preventing the production of those qualities”<sup>84</sup> that constitute desirable character traits.

Whereas ethology examines the character formation of individuals, social science deals with the actions of groups of human beings. We often regard social and political phenomena as constituting collective bodies, but Mill rejects any social chemistry at this level. Even in social interaction, human beings “are obedient to

<sup>79</sup> Hume, *Principles of Morals*, in *Enquiries*, 222.

<sup>80</sup> Mill, CW 8:853.

<sup>81</sup> Mill, CW 8:839.

<sup>82</sup> Mill, CW 8:839.

<sup>83</sup> Mill, CW 8:864.

<sup>84</sup> Mill, CW 8:874.

the laws of individual human nature”<sup>85</sup> – that is, to the laws of psychology and ethology. We are not “when brought together, converted into another kind of substance, with different properties.”<sup>86</sup> Whereas the “chemical method” had been accepted for psychology, it is not for social science. Equally inappropriate for the social sciences is the geometrical method that appeals to general premises such as abstract right or obligation. It is noteworthy that Mill also criticizes crude utilitarians who derive all politics from self-interest. He points out that it is false to think that even average rulers are wholly or primarily determined by their personal interest. Instead they are “largely influenced ... by the habitual sentiments and feelings, the general modes of thinking and acting, which prevail throughout the community of which they are members.... They are also much influenced by the maxims and traditions which have descended to them from other rulers, their predecessors.”<sup>87</sup>

Social science, or sociology, must consider not just one main cause operative in human interaction, but all of them. It must, according to Mill, follow the concrete deductive method of astronomy rather than the abstract deductive method of geometry. However, because the web of human interaction is much more complex than the orbits of the planets, we should not expect positive predictions of outcomes, merely of tendencies. The state of human society at any moment involves the correlation of many factors such as intellectual and moral culture, economic and class development, and form of government. Moreover, there exist uniformities of coexistence among these elements so that not any combination is possible. “States of society are like different constitutions or different ages in the physical frame; they are conditions not of one or a few organs or functions, but of the whole organism.”<sup>88</sup> For this reason it is unwise to separate out distinct disciplines like economics and the science of government as if one could adequately study the organism of society one organ at a time.

Yet the uniformities of coexistence that characterize any overall state of society are for Mill merely derivative “from the laws which regulate the succession between one state of society and another, for the proximate cause of every state of society is the state of society immediately preceding it.”<sup>89</sup> This claim that social statics is dependent on social dynamics raises the question whether there are historical laws of development that govern society such as had been proposed by French thinkers such as Turgot and Comte. On this score, Mill argues that “the succession of states of the human mind and of human society cannot have

<sup>85</sup> Mill, CW 8:879.

<sup>86</sup> Mill, CW 8:879.

<sup>87</sup> Mill, CW 8:891.

<sup>88</sup> Mill, CW 8:912.

<sup>89</sup> Mill, CW 8:912.

an independent law of its own; it must depend on the psychological and ethological laws which govern the action of circumstances on men and of men on circumstances.”<sup>90</sup>

Only psychological-ethological laws can be independent or scientific laws of nature. Any uniformity suggested by historical succession can at best be an “empirical law.”<sup>91</sup> It is easy to make erroneous generalizations from the mere study of history. The proper historical method is the inverse deductive method, which verifies a generalization suggested by history by deriving it from psychological and ethological laws. According to Mill, this method requires proper laws of human nature to confirm that empirical historical laws are “the derivative laws naturally to be expected as the consequences of those ultimate ones.”<sup>92</sup> The task of the moral sciences is thus to discover the laws of human nature and to reconcile them with the general facts of history.

#### RECONCEIVING THE HUMAN SCIENCES – DILTHEY’S CRITIQUE OF HISTORICAL REASON

Dilthey’s *Introduction to the Human Sciences* of 1883 is, on the one hand, a response to Comte and Mill; on the other, an attempt to reappropriate some of the insights of German antecedents. Dilthey rejects Comte’s positive philosophy, its sociological system, and its overly sweeping formulation of the law of historical progress.<sup>93</sup> He appreciates Mill’s efforts to defend psychology as a proper moral science but finds it inadequately conceived. The mechanistic, chemical, and organic analogies exploited by Mill are rejected as inappropriate for understanding what distinguishes the human sciences from the natural sciences. Finally, he ridicules the pseudo-scientific rigor of differentiating all kinds of inductive and deductive methods.

Dilthey conceived his approach as part of a critique of historical reason that aims to do for the human sciences what Kant had done for the natural sciences. This would focus on the epistemological conditions that make historical cognition possible. Just as Kant had attempted to find a path between the empiricism of Hume, the abstract rationalism of Leibniz, and the concrete speculations of Hamann and Herder, Dilthey tried to find an alternative to the spiritual

<sup>90</sup> Mill, CW 8:914.

<sup>91</sup> Mill, CW 8:914.

<sup>92</sup> Mill, CW 8:916.

<sup>93</sup> See Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, vol. 1 of *Selected Works*, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 183; Dilthey, GS 1:133–4. See also Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, vol. 4 of *Selected Works*, eds. Makkreel and Rodi, 355; Dilthey, GS 3:238.

speculations of Hegel, the contextualism of the historical school, and the positivistic efforts to reduce history to a correlation of facts and general laws.

Central to Dilthey's *Introduction to the Human Sciences* is the attempt to differentiate the human sciences from the natural sciences without, however, creating a metaphysical gap between nature and spirit. Dilthey has some doubts about the term *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) in that it could suggest that we live in a realm of spirit that is removed from nature.<sup>94</sup> However, he finds the neo-Kantian term *Kulturwissenschaften* (cultural sciences) even more problematic in that it focuses too much on the voluntaristic and intellectual achievements of human beings and does not make room for psychology. For the neo-Kantians, psychology was a natural science. Dilthey appeals to spirit, not as a domain of being, but as that which allows us to relate mind back to life. Psychology as a *Geisteswissenschaft* must be reconceived as a science that describes the fullness of lived experience. This means getting away from the representational theory of consciousness that still defines Mill's psychology. Instead of regarding consciousness as composed of internalized sensations or momentary representations, which then need to be linked by laws of association, Dilthey conceives of consciousness as a presentational being-there-for-me over time.

What is sensed is at the same time felt in what Dilthey calls a "reflexive awareness (*Innewerden*)."<sup>95</sup> This is a prereflective mode of "consciousness that does not place a content over against (*gegenüber-stellen*) the subject of consciousness – it does not re-present by placing something before itself (*vor-stellen*) – ; rather, a content is present in it without reflective differentiation. That which constitutes its content is in no way distinguished from that in which it occurs."<sup>96</sup> Lived experience is something reflexively felt or had. It is not something represented or observed, but directly possessed. In ordinary life we experience things in ways that precede any subject-object distinction of epistemology. Indeed the traditional epistemology of Locke and Kant has been couched in the intellectual terms required for the tasks of the natural sciences. It is necessary to develop a new epistemology for the human sciences that explicates not only the I-think of Kant's first *Critique*, but also the I-will and I-feel of the other two *Critiques*. What is directly given in the fullness of reflexive awareness must be spelled out through what Dilthey calls "self-reflection." It is only at the level of reflection that the temporal continuum of consciousness can be differentiated into the self-world

<sup>94</sup> In 1875, Dilthey still used more neutral terms such as "sciences of human beings, society and the state" and "moral-political sciences." See his "Über das Studium der Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und dem Staat (1875)," in *Die Geistige Welt: Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens*, Dilthey, GS 5:31–73.

<sup>95</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 247; Dilthey, GS 19:60.

<sup>96</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 253–4; Dilthey, GS 19:66.

distinction. Consciousness is thus not grounded in a preexisting self or subject. Rather, consciousness is a continuum that only gradually articulates itself into an ego-identity.

Consciousness abstractly conceived is an adaptive life-nexus that unfolds over time. But more concretely conceived it is a spiritual process that works out its own “conditions of conceivability.”<sup>97</sup> In an early draft to Book 4 of the *Introduction to the Human Sciences* Dilthey writes:

I incorporate the theory of the conditions of consciousness as instituted by Kant, but critically transformed, into the theory of self-actualizing knowledge and of the history of science. . . . My theory makes it possible to replace the mechanical clatter of induction and deduction in Comte, Mill, and Spencer with insight into the sovereign nature of the human intellect, into how it appropriates objects and constructs them by means of the conditions of consciousness. Yet at the same time – and here lies the main difference between Kant and myself – the intellect also transforms its own conditions of consciousness through its engagement with things. Kant’s a priori is fixed and dead; but the real conditions of consciousness and its presuppositions, as I grasp them, constitute a living historical process, a development; they have a history, and the course of this history involves their adaptation to the ever more exact, inductively known manifold of sense-contents.<sup>98</sup>

A new epistemology will have to be developed in conjunction with a new descriptive psychology. Instead of using psychology to explain the succession of mental states à la Mill, Dilthey proposes a different kind of psychology that describes mental processes in terms of their general structures. Rather than search for psychological laws to connect discrete states, Dilthey explicates the inner connectedness of psychic life. What is fundamental to our lived experience is that it is part of a larger continuum or nexus. Neither the mechanical, chemical, nor organic models appealed to by Comte and Mill are appropriate for conceiving psychic connectedness. The psychic nexus is not an aggregate, not a chemical coalescence; nor does it involve the organic intertwining of member parts. It presents a sui generis mode of togetherness that is more akin to understanding how a sentence forms a unit of meaning.

The primary task of the human sciences is to *understand* the meaning of the experiences and actions of human beings. Whereas the world of nature presents us with a series of externally related events that requires lawful uniformities to explain connectedness, the historical world is experienced as connected from within. It is, as Giambattista Vico had already noted, a world in which we participate. Here description can already produce understanding. To be sure, the

<sup>97</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 501; Dilthey, GS 19:45.

<sup>98</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 500–1; Dilthey, GS 19:44.

continuum provided by lived experience is often rather vague and indeterminate. The task of psychology is thus not only to describe, but also to analyze how specific parts fit into the whole. Dilthey acknowledges that we are not always fully conscious of every aspect of experience and that to compensate, causal explanation will be necessary to fill in gaps in our understanding. This shows that there is no metaphysical divide between the physical world and the psychical realm. Processes of consciousness can, after all, be influenced by physiological states. The independence of the human world from the natural world is only limited, but the conditions for access to them are fundamentally different. The spheres of psychic life, moral action, social interaction, and cultural development constitute a human realm within the realm of nature.<sup>99</sup>

By contrast to Comte and Mill, Dilthey resists the effort to make one human science basic or definitive. Comte's sociology cannot be the all-encompassing science that explains human history. Nor can all social behavior be derived from Mill's laws of psychology and ethological corollaries about individual characters. Dilthey is as suspicious of treating individual psyches as simple elements of society as he is of finding some all-encompassing communal perspective that subsumes everything. Individuals are points of intersection that incorporate many historical and social qualities. It is thus more fruitful to describe the individual as a system of functions, rather than as a simple unit. "Man as a fact prior to history and society is a fiction of genetic explanation; the human being which a sound analytic science takes as its object is the individual as a component of society."<sup>100</sup> This means that even psychological descriptions of human behavior must appeal to "second-order concepts" that refer to social systems. Thus the character trait of thrift incorporates a reference to economic conditions.<sup>101</sup> It is this kind of intersection of psychological and economic traits that provides us the kind of structural articulation of understanding that defines Dilthey's approach.

Dilthey argues against Comte and Mill that the issue for the human sciences is not whether they should start from abstract deductive truths and then inductively verify them or whether they should first proceed inductively on the basis of gathering facts and then confirm them deductively from human nature. Their question whether we should start from above or from below only makes sense if we want to explain phenomena the way the natural sciences do. From Dilthey's perspective of understanding, the real task of the human sciences lies at the intermediary level, where the intersection of the particular and the universal occurs. Dilthey focuses on two intermediary structures or midrange contexts in relation to which human beings experience their lives. These are what he calls "cultural systems" and the

<sup>99</sup> See Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 58; Dilthey, GS 1:6.

<sup>100</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 83; Dilthey, GS 1:31–2.

<sup>101</sup> See Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 96; Dilthey, GS 1:46.

“external organization of society.”<sup>102</sup> Cultural systems are purposive associations through which individuals choose to cooperate for the achievement of specific ends. These systems organize more than what we would today call “culture.” They include the arts, to be sure, but they also encompass scientific and economic cooperation as well as law, religion, and philosophy. Individuals preserve their independence as they cooperate in cultural systems. Matters are different in relation to the external organization of society, which represents the institutional power structures that we are born into or inherit. The family, the state, the church, and the legal system are such structures. These institutions limit our independence.

Certain spheres such as the law can be understood in both ways. On the one hand, “law is a purposive system based on a sense of justice as a constantly operative psychological fact.”<sup>103</sup> Law as a purposive cultural system articulates the normative sense of individuals about what ought to be the case. It represents the theory of what is right and is often couched in universal terms. On the other hand, law as part of the external organization of society is positive law as it has been codified in regional legal systems. This is how Dilthey characterizes the latter: “Law arises only in the form of imperatives, behind which there stands a will with the intent to enforce them. Now this will is a collective will, i.e., the unified will of a group; it resides in the external organization of society, whether in a community, a state, or a church.”<sup>104</sup> Law needs both a collective will to enforce it and individual wills to perfect it. Neither aspect of law is possible without the other. “They are not connected as cause and effect, but each has the other as the condition of its existence.”<sup>105</sup>

Not only should the human sciences be focused on intermediary systems, they must balance their efforts to find universal truths with the recognition of historical roots. We see this in Dilthey’s attempt to find a middle ground between the universal aspirations of the Enlightenment and the local specification and intuitive richness demanded by the historical school. He writes:

The problem posed by natural law is soluble only in the context of the positive sciences of law. But these sciences in turn can attain a clear awareness of the relation between the abstractions which they use and reality only by means of a foundational epistemology and by establishing the reference of their concepts and propositions to psychological and psychophysical facts. From this it follows that there is no special philosophy of law and that instead the task of such a discipline will have to devolve on a philosophically grounded system of the positive human sciences.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> See Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 102; Dilthey, GS 1:52.

<sup>103</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 105; Dilthey, GS 1:54–5.

<sup>104</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 106; Dilthey, GS 1:56.

<sup>105</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 105; Dilthey, GS 1:55.

<sup>106</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 129; Dilthey, GS 1:79.



Dilthey is opposed to grand systems of the philosophy of law as well as to the speculative philosophies of history of Hegel and Comte. Instead of using philosophy to project a priori systems, it should be used to reflect on the conditions of doing empirical inquiry about human life under historical constraints. Another way to express this is to regard the role of philosophy as formative and analytical rather than as constructive and synthetic. When Dilthey appeals to a collective will expressed in the law, he always balances it with an analysis of what individual wills are doing and striving for. The idea of the collective is never used explanatively, but merely as a framework for understanding. It is thus possible to regard the family as the “womb of all human order, of all group-life”<sup>107</sup> and yet refuse to see it as a cell-like unit in which individuals are fully submerged. “Whoever starts with a cell-like conception of the life of the family can only end up with a socialistic organization of society.”<sup>108</sup>

Dilthey’s *Geisteswissenschaften* are sensitive to the efficacy of collective forces but stop short of reifying them into explanative causes. Collective forces must always be understood in relation to the individuals who are implicated in them. Thus the kind of psychology of peoples (*Völkerpsychologie*) that Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal were attempting to establish aroused great suspicion in Dilthey. The idea of the soul of a people (*Völkseele*) is a mystical construct that is “no more usable in history than is the concept of life-force in physiology.”<sup>109</sup> A “people” is not a real subject of history, and the meaning of this term can only be understood through analyzing it into such smaller-scale cultural systems as the language, religion, and art that characterize the individuals who compose it.

#### THE HUMAN SCIENCES AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

In the final analysis, it is possible to regard Dilthey’s theory of the human sciences as a selective reappropriation of insights from a whole range of the thinkers who have been discussed in this chapter. Hume’s claim that the moral sciences lack the demonstrative certainty of the mathematical sciences is accepted, but not the corollary that because they concern matters of taste and sentiment, they cannot produce understanding. Dilthey differentiates between *Verstand*, which is mere intellectual understanding, and *Verstehen*, which is the more encompassing understanding that involves all our capacities – volitional, affective, and intellectual. Kant’s claim that taste can be reflectively warranted is endorsed by Dilthey’s efforts to articulate reflective commonalities. Although he was more hopeful about the capacity of psychology to produce self-knowledge than Kant and

<sup>107</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 123; Dilthey, GS 1:74.

<sup>108</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 124; Dilthey, GS 1:74.

<sup>109</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 92; Dilthey, GS 1:41.

Comte, he took note of their doubts about introspection and increasingly relied on the expression of lived experience for validation. The early Dilthey was very critical of the metaphysical presuppositions of Hegel's philosophy of spirit and its tendency to subordinate individual behavior to the ethos of the community. But in his last writings Hegel's conception of objective spirit is reconceived more empirically to designate the medium of commonality in which individuals participate.<sup>110</sup> Like Humboldt, Dilthey aims to relate the immanent workings of local cultures to larger universal concerns, but instead of doing so in terms of religious and idealistic assumptions, he adopts a more neutral epistemological approach.

The most direct influence on Dilthey was that of Ranke and Boeckh, whose lectures he attended. Boeckh extended the hermeneutic approach initiated by Schleiermacher, which increasingly replaced Dilthey's early reliance on psychology. Direct understanding through lived experience must be confirmed by the interpretation of expressions of lived experience. Droysen preceded Dilthey in making an explanation-understanding distinction in order to differentiate history from the natural sciences. Whereas Droysen assumes that causal explanation is not possible in history because we are fundamentally free, Dilthey is really much closer to Mill in allowing physiological causes to manifest themselves in the moral world. Both Mill and Dilthey argue for a relative independence of the world of mind and moral action, but only for the latter is it significant enough to warrant a distinct mode of approach.

We have seen several attempts to formulate special laws for the human sciences. In Comte they were laws of the historical development of the human intellect; for Marx they were economic laws of social progress; for Mill they were psychological and ethological laws of human nature. Because he placed great limits on explanation in the human sciences, Dilthey restricted the scope of laws in the human sciences. There are no overall historical laws, at best laws that apply to mid-range purposive systems, whether they be cultural systems defined by the sciences and the arts or organizational structures such as political institutions. Each can be said to exhibit the kind of immanent purposiveness that Kant had introduced in the *Critique of Judgment*. Because every specific art has its own medium, the laws of its development will differ. Thus the baroque stages in the development of painting and in music do not coincide.

Probably the most distinctive nineteenth-century contributions to the development of the human sciences are to be found in the methodological and reflective refinements contributed by such thinkers as Boeckh, Droysen, Mill, and Dilthey. Boeckh and Droysen introduced many levels of philological and

<sup>110</sup> See Dilthey's *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, vol. 3 of *Selected Works*, eds. Makkreel and Rodi, 168–74; Dilthey, GS 7:146–52. These writings dating from 1910 fall outside the scope of this chapter.

historical understanding relevant for the human sciences. We also discussed Mill's many inductive and deductive methods, which are claimed to be equally relevant to the natural and moral sciences. By contrast, Dilthey's discussions of method are more general. He distinguishes methods that recur in every domain from methods peculiar to particular kinds of problems.

Dilthey's theory of method is based on the interdependence of four basic operations of thought related to the tasks of knowledge in general: these operations are analysis, induction, experiment, and comparison. Analysis and induction together establish a "regressive path"<sup>111</sup> for all the sciences by which the factors of reality as a whole and the relations among them can become known. In the natural sciences, analysis is pushed into abstraction that generates ideal elements or limits. On the basis of constant elements, experiment and comparison are transformed into a deductive and synthetic method that explains in terms of causal laws. In the human sciences, however, analysis and comparison become part of the process of self-reflection. Our position within the systems of the social world discloses the artificiality of abstracting ideal limits. Explanation in terms of constructs can be minimized and largely replaced by understanding the real intermediary structural relations in which we participate.

There is one further important difference that can be noted about these theories of the moral or human sciences. Boeckh, Droysen, Comte, and Mill each argue for one general science (respectively, philology, history, sociology, and psychology-ethology), within which many detailed methods are then distinguished. Dilthey distinguishes fewer special methods but insists that the historical world can only be understood through the cooperation of a plurality of human sciences.

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<sup>111</sup> Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 433f.; Dilthey, GS 19:445.

## II

# THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE GOOD: AESTHETICS, 1790–1870

PAUL GUYER

The year 1790 was the start of a major chapter in the history of aesthetics. That was the year, of course, of the publication of Immanuel Kant's long-awaited "critique of taste," in the form of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment," the first half of his third *Critique*, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. This epochal work attempted to resolve many of the debates central to the first century of modern aesthetics, which can be regarded as having commenced with such works as the Earl of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* of 1711,<sup>1</sup> Joseph Addison's *Spectator* essays on "The Pleasures of the Imagination" of 1712,<sup>2</sup> and Francis Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* of 1725,<sup>3</sup> all in Britain; the Abbé Du Bos's 1719 *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music*<sup>4</sup> in France; and the German Alexander Baumgarten's 1735 *Meditations on Poetry*,<sup>5</sup> which gave the nascent discipline its name. Kant's work in turn set the agenda for much of the philosophical and critical work in aesthetics throughout Europe for following decades, certainly through the publication of Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World*

<sup>1</sup> For a recent edition, see Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Larwrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> *Spectator*, nos. 411–21, June 21–July 4, 1712.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Kivy published a modern edition of the first part of Hutcheson's *Inquiry*: Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, ed. Peter Kivy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973). But this edition does not include the important response to Berkeley that Hutcheson included in his fourth edition, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London: D. Midwinter, 1738), following p. 304, and obscures the fact that Hutcheson intended his treatise on aesthetics primarily as an introduction to his ethics – a fact no doubt of more interest in the last decade than in the 1970s. The recent edition of both treatises by Wolfgang Leidhold is based on the first edition, but makes the fourth edition additions available in its endnotes: Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, revised edition, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting, and Music*, trans. Thomas Nugent, from the 5th French ed., 3 vols. (London: John Nourse, 1748).

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, ed. and trans Heinz Paetzold (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1983); English translation as *Reflections on Poetry*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and W. B. Holther (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954).

as *Will and Representation* and the first of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's lecture courses on the fine arts, both in 1818, but in a number of forms well beyond this date too. But Kant's *Critique* was not the only significant work in aesthetics published in 1790. In Germany, Kant's former student Marcus Herz published a second edition of his own *Essay on Taste*, originally published in 1776,<sup>6</sup> and Karl Heinrich Heydenreich, an enthusiastic follower of Kant in other areas, published a massive *System of Aesthetics*, which insisted on a place for the emotions in aesthetic experience in a way quite foreign to Kant. In Britain, a much better-known work, Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, also made the case for the centrality of emotions in the aesthetic experience of both nature and art, an emphasis that would still reverberate in essays by John Stuart Mill almost half a century later and that would provide the ultimate target for the alternative notion of "aesthetic distance" promulgated in the early twentieth century. The year 1790 thus marks a significant boundary between one chapter in the history of aesthetics and the next.<sup>7</sup>

Philosophers, critics, and artists writing on aesthetics and the fine arts in the period to be covered in this chapter discussed a wide range of topics. But there are some common themes in their work, perhaps none more central than the question of how to understand the relation between aesthetic experience and the development of morality, which has also been prominent recently.<sup>8</sup> Kant

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Herz, *Versuch über den Geschmack*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Voss, 1790). There has been no modern German edition or English translation of Herz's interesting work; for some discussion, see Paul Guyer, "Nature, Art, and Autonomy," in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), especially 241–8.

<sup>7</sup> Literature on the history of aesthetics is extensive. A small selection of works useful for the study of the period covered by this chapter would include Bernard Bosanquet, *History of Aesthetic*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1904); Katharine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics*, rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1953); Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1966); Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, trans. Robert de Loaiza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, trans. Steven Rendell (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also Sebastian Gardner, "Philosophical Aestheticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*, eds. Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 75–121. Brief essays and up-to-date bibliographies on many of the figures to be discussed here can be found in Julian Nida-Rümelin and Monika Betzler, eds., *Ästhetik und Kunstphilosophie: Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart in Einzeldarstellungen* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> For examples of recent contributions to this debate, see Jerrold Levinson, ed., *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), especially the essays by Noël Carroll and Berys Gaut.

wrote his third *Critique* in order to explain how the apparently distinct domains “of the concept of nature under ... one legislation and that of the concept of freedom under [an]other”<sup>9</sup> could be made to fit together, in particular to show how our experiences of beauty and sublimity in nature and art, as well as of purposiveness in natural organisms and in nature as an organic system itself, could be interpreted as evidence of the realizability in nature of the aims of human morality without sacrificing what makes both aesthetic and teleological experience distinct from both ordinary scientific explanation and ordinary moral reasoning. Kant’s view was that the experiences of both the beautiful and the sublime in nature symbolize various aspects of morality of the will and can prepare us to act disinterestedly or even contrary to our own desires; that the fine arts can embody moral ideas without sacrificing the free play of our cognitive powers, essential to aesthetic experience, through the medium of aesthetic ideas; and that the existence of both natural beauty and natural organisms gives us a hint that nature is a suitable arena for our moral efforts and thus helps us preserve our moral resolve, without making or presupposing the theoretical assertion that nature has been designed at all, let alone with a moral end in view. With such claims, Kant argued for a real connection between aesthetic experience and moral development, but he did not assert that aesthetic experience was either a necessary or a sufficient condition for moral development. Few of Kant’s successors preserved the delicacy of Kant’s connections between aesthetics and morality. Beginning almost immediately with Friedrich Schiller, many post-Kantians argued for a direct and even indispensable influence of aesthetic experience on moral development, and shortly after Schiller, Friedrich Schelling interpreted artistic beauty as direct evidence of a necessary harmony between mankind and nature, an insistence that had a profound influence on subsequent thinkers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Britain and Ralph Waldo Emerson in the United States. The transformation of Kant’s conception of the relation between aesthetics and morality at the hands of writers ranging from his immediate German successors such as Schiller and Schelling to characteristic mid-nineteenth-century writers such as John Stuart Mill and John Ruskin in Britain will be a central theme for this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Citations from this translation will be indicated by CPJ, Kant’s section number, and the pagination of the German text in, *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–), vol. 5, ed. Wilhelm Windelband (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1913; references to any volume of this edition of Kant’s collected works will be indicated by Kant, Ak), which is provided in the margins of the Cambridge edition. This quotation is from CPJ, Introduction IX; Kant, Ak 5:195.

## KANT

The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* did not spring from Kant's mind in 1790 without any preparation.<sup>10</sup> In this work, Kant (1724–1804) not only attempted to provide a more detailed account of empirical knowledge to flesh out his abstract theory of its a priori conditions, expounded in the *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781 and 1787, and to clarify the relations between his theoretical and his practical philosophy, expounded in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1785 and the *Critique of Practical Reason* of 1788; he also attempted to resolve the central debates in eighteenth-century aesthetics, which he had been following since the 1760s. One debate that Kant attempted to resolve was that between rationalist and empiricist conceptions of aesthetic production and judgment. We may tend to think of that as a debate between German and British philosophies, a contrast between the Leibniz-Wolffian conception of beauty as the sensuous presentation of ontological perfections for which determinate concepts and rules are at least in principle possible (the position epitomized by Baumgarten and his follower Georg Friedrich Meier) and a Humean or associationist position on which aesthetic preferences reflect contingent features of the human mind about which only inductive generalizations are possible;<sup>11</sup> however, a similar debate also took place more locally, within German philosophy and poetics, between the

<sup>10</sup> The literature on Kant's aesthetics has grown exponentially since the pathbreaking book by Donald W. Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974). In what follows I have of course relied on my previous volumes, the monograph *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (1st ed., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979; 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and the collection of historical and systematic studies, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Other valuable works include Salim Kemal, *Kant and Fine Art: An Essay on Kant and the Philosophy of Fine Art and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Anthony Savile, *Aesthetic Reconstructions: The Seminal Writings of Lessing, Kant, and Schiller* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Dieter Henrich, *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World: Studies in Kant* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992); Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); and Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The best studies of the development of Kant's aesthetics have not been in English: they include Paul Menzer, *Kants Ästhetik in ihrer Entwicklung* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1952); Giorgio Tonelli, *Kant, dall'estetica metafisica all'estetica psicoempirica* (Turin: Accademia delle Scienze, 1955); Hans-Georg Juchem, *Die Entwicklung des Begriffs des Schönen bei Kant* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1970); and Daniel Dumouchel, *Kant et la genèse de la subjectivité esthétique* (Paris: Vrin, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> See Hume's famous essay "Of the Standard of Taste," originally published in his *Four Dissertations* (London, 1757), but also many passages scattered throughout his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40). For discussion, see Peter Jones, *Hume's Sentiments: Their Ciceronian and French Context* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1982); Paul Guyer, "The Standard of Taste and the 'Most Arden Desire of Society,'" in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, eds. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 37–66; and Dabney Townsend, *Hume's Aesthetic Theory: Taste and Sentiment* (London: Routledge, 2001).

rationalist Johann Christoph Gottsched,<sup>12</sup> influenced not only by Wolff but also by the classicist poetics of seventeenth-century France, and the Swiss critics J. J. Bodmer and J. J. Breitinger, who argued for a poetics and criticism based more on felt responses than on a priori rules.<sup>13</sup> Kant would have been as familiar with the latter local debate as with the now better-known international debate. Either way, he was clearly attempting to steer a way between rationalism and empiricism about taste with his conception of an a priori principle of aesthetic judgment that would postulate the essential similarity of human cognitive capacities, and thus the possibility of intersubjective validity in aesthetic responses and judgments, without yielding rules for making particular judgments of taste by the application of determinate concepts to their objects.<sup>14</sup> But another central debate in eighteenth-century aesthetics concerned the connection between aesthetics and morality, with Francis Hutcheson, who held that the feeling of beauty is a perception of unity amid variety in the form and materials of an object that is independent of any prudential or moral interest that we might take in the object, on one side, and, on the other, almost every other philosopher of the period, all of whom held that our aesthetic pleasures and preferences, although certainly impersonal, nevertheless reflect our underlying, species-wide principles of value in general, however they understood the latter, whether in terms of a metaphysical conception of perfection as in Leibniz and Wolff or, for example, in terms of natural drives for the preservation of the self and the species as in Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime (grounded in a feeling of safety satisfying the drive for self-preservation) and the beautiful (grounded in the features men find beautiful in women and thus linked to the preservation of the species).<sup>15</sup> This debate

<sup>12</sup> Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (Leipzig, 1730), modern ed. in Gottsched, *Schriften zur Literatur*, ed. Horst Steinmetz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1972).

<sup>13</sup> See Johann Jakob Bodmer, *Critische Abhandlung von dem Wunderbaren in der Poesie* (Zürich, 1740), and Johann Jakob Breitinger, *Critische Dichtkunst* (Zürich, 1740). For discussion of Gottsched, Bodmer, and Breitinger, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), 331–8, and Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 141–8. Bodmer and Breitinger in turn influenced Johann Georg Sulzer, whose massive encyclopedia *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*, originally published in Leipzig from 1771 to 1774, gives an overview of the state of aesthetics immediately prior to Kant's intervention. The later editions, equipped with bibliographies prepared by Friedrich von Blankenburg, remain the most extensive bibliographical resource for the study of eighteenth-century aesthetics; see Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste in einzeln, nach alphabetischer Ordnung der Kunstwörter auf einander folgenden, Artikeln*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1792–4); facsimile reprint, intr. by Giorgio Tonelli, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> See CPJ §§32–4, 56–7.

<sup>15</sup> See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757, 2nd ed. with an "Introduction on Taste," 1759), ed. J. T. Boulton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958). For a discussion of this debate, see Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, chap. 2.



also took a local German form, with a strong connection between aesthetics and morality maintained by Moses Mendelssohn and Johann Georg Sulzer, the author of a massive compendium of aesthetic theory and artistic practice first published from 1771 to 1774, which maintained throughout the moral content and benefit of the best work in the fine arts,<sup>16</sup> and the opposite maintained by a slender essay published in 1785 by Karl Philipp Moritz, “An Essay toward the Unification of All of the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of That Which Is Complete in Itself,” which argued that a work of art is beautiful because of an internal perfection that is independent of all external interests, which should be regarded as the true source of the later doctrine of “art for art’s sake.”<sup>17</sup> Hume had earlier attempted to resolve this debate in his *Treatise of Human Nature* by the simple expedient of assuming two forms of beauty, the beauty of mere form or “*species*,” on the one hand, and that of actual or apparent utility, on the other, although he also asserted that the most instances of beauty were actually cases of the beauty of utility rather than form.<sup>18</sup> Kant would resolve both the international and the local debate by interpreting the experience of beauty not, like Moritz, as our response to some purposiveness internal to the work of art itself, but rather as our pleasure in the subjective purposiveness of the object for us, namely, the free play of our own cognitive faculties induced by the form of a beautiful object, but then arguing that it is precisely the free and disinterested character of this cognitive response that allows aesthetic experience to make the nature of freedom in general palpable to us, thereby allowing the beautiful to become a symbol of the morally good and even a preparation for being good.<sup>19</sup> (Hume’s way of resolving this debate, however, would also be echoed by Kant’s famous distinction between “free” and “adherent” beauty in §16 of the third *Critique*.)

Following the textbooks of Baumgarten and his disciple Georg Friedrich Meier,<sup>20</sup> Kant included brief discussions of aesthetic judgment in his lectures on logic and metaphysics as early as 1770, and more extensive discussions of beauty, taste, genius, and the system of the fine arts in his anthropology lectures, begun in 1772–3, which were based on the chapter “Empirical Psychology” in

<sup>16</sup> See note 11.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Philipp Moritz, “Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten: An Herrn Moses Mendelssohn,” in *Werke*, 3 vols., ed. Horst Günther (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), 2:543–8.

<sup>18</sup> See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), bk. II, pt. I, sec. viii, 195.

<sup>19</sup> CPJ §59 and General Remark following §29.

<sup>20</sup> Meier published his three-volume *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* (Halle, 1748–9) prior to the two parts of Baumgarten’s never-completed *Aesthetica* (1750; reprint, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961), which were published in 1750 and 1758, although he always maintained that his work was based on Baumgarten’s lectures. Kant was probably more familiar with Meier’s textbook than with Baumgarten’s rarer volumes.

Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*.<sup>21</sup> Kant introduced his central idea that our experience of beauty is an experience of the free play or harmony of imagination and understanding into these lectures by the middle of the 1770s but maintained throughout these lectures, as well as in both editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,<sup>22</sup> that there can be only empirical generalizations about the properties of objects that could produce such a response, and thus that there can be no a priori principles of taste. The fundamental innovation of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is then the claim that judgments of taste are based on the free play of the cognitive powers, not the subsumption of their objects under determinate concepts, and thus cannot depend upon a priori principles about their *objects*, but yet that they can rightfully claim intersubjective validity – “universal subjective validity,” as Kant calls it<sup>23</sup> – and thus must be grounded in an a priori principle positing the similarity of the cognitive powers among all human *subjects*. The attempt to provide a justification, or “transcendental deduction,” of such a principle is thus the culmination of the first stage of Kant's argument in the third *Critique*.

Kant begins by assuming that a judgment of taste is inherently subjective, or “aesthetic,” in that it both is grounded in a particular subject's feeling of pleasure in an object and makes an assertion about that feeling of pleasure, namely, that this pleasure is not restricted to the subject making the judgment but can be expected to occur, at least under ideal circumstances, in everyone who experiences the object. Kant has two ways of reaching this claim. In the “First Moment” of the “Analytic of the Beautiful,” he argues, at least in part by an appeal to our intuitions about what is relevant to judgments of beauty, that a judgment of taste is independent of any interest. Here Kant defines a special sense of “interest” as “the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object”<sup>24</sup> rather than taking it in its ordinary sense as any ground for partiality rather than impartiality toward an object, but he assumes that his special sense entails this ordinary one and thus begins the “Second Moment” of the “Analytic” by asserting that the disinterestedness of a judgment of taste entails its universal

<sup>21</sup> Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1963) was first published in 1739 and went through numerous editions. Meier published a German translation in 1776, *Metaphysik* (1783; reprint, Jena: Dietrich Schlegelmann Reprints, 2004), but Kant continued to base his lectures on Baumgarten's Latin text. The latter was reprinted in vols. 17 and 18 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Erich Adickes (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1924–6), which contain the notes for Kant's lectures on metaphysics and related fragments. A selection of Kant's lectures on anthropology from 1772 to 1789, which contain extensive material related to his emerging aesthetics, was published as vol. 25 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Reinhard Brandt and Werner Stark (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A21/B35–6n.

<sup>23</sup> CPJ §8.

<sup>24</sup> CPJ §2, Kant, Ak 5:204.

validity.<sup>25</sup> But in the “Second Moment” he also appeals directly to our ordinary linguistic practice to argue that we never properly say of an object that it is “beautiful *for me*”;<sup>26</sup> rather, we always claim that any beautiful object is necessarily pleasing to anyone, at least anyone who approaches it in the right frame of mind. Kant calls the universality that is claimed by a judgment of taste “subjectively universal validity,” because we do not assert that any object in a class defined by some determinate concept is necessarily pleasing, but rather that any properly situated subject will find this particular object pleasing.<sup>27</sup> In the “Fourth Moment,” Kant also calls the claim made by a judgment of taste a claim of “exemplary necessity,” the “necessity of the assent of *all* to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce.”<sup>28</sup>

But what could justify such a claim? Kant’s theory is that in order to justify the assertion of the universal validity of our pleasure in an object, that pleasure must be due to the engagement of our cognitive faculties with the object, because our cognitive faculties can be assumed to work the same way in all of us, but for that engagement of the cognitive faculties to be noticeably pleasurable, it must not comprise the subsumption of the object under a determinate concept, as in ordinary cognition, but must instead be a free play of those faculties, resulting in a pleasurable sense that our ordinary cognitive goal of unifying the manifold of our experience has been satisfied even without the use of a determinate concept. The claim that our pleasure in a beautiful object is caused by a free yet harmonious play of our cognitive faculties – in the case of beauty, specifically the faculties of imagination and understanding – is what Kant calls the “key to the critique of taste,”<sup>29</sup> and the argument that these cognitive faculties must work the same way in all of us because they are the very same faculties that are involved in all of our cognition is the “deduction of judgments of taste.”<sup>30</sup> Each of these claims is problematic: the first because the idea that we could ever experience any object *without* applying one or indeed many determinate concepts to it seems incompatible with central claims of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, and the second because Kant seems far from having shown that even the most fundamental cognitive faculties must really work the same way in every human being. The first problem can be overcome by interpreting the special sense of harmony that characterizes our experience of a beautiful object as going *beyond* whatever unity is entailed by the determinate concepts that apply to the object. Indeed, such an interpretation is

<sup>25</sup> CPJ §6, Kant, Ak 5:211–12.

<sup>26</sup> CPJ §7, Kant, Ak 5:212.

<sup>27</sup> See CPJ §8, Kant, Ak 5:213–16.

<sup>28</sup> CPJ §18, Kant, Ak 5:237.

<sup>29</sup> CPJ §9, Kant, Ak 5:216; see also Introduction, sec. VII, Kant, Ak 5:189–90.

<sup>30</sup> CPJ §38, Kant, Ak 5:289–91; see also §21, Kant, Ak 5:238–9.

needed to make sense of Kant's concept of "adherent" beauty, the beauty of an object, whether natural or artificial, such as a race horse or a summerhouse, that is recognized to have a definite purpose whose satisfaction can provide a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the beauty of the object,<sup>31</sup> as well as his theory of artistic beauty, for a work of "art always has a determinate intention,"<sup>32</sup> so its beauty must lie in something going beyond this intention. But it is not clear that there is any way to defend Kant's claim that all human cognitive faculties work the same way, and thus that any genuine judgment of taste must be universally valid.

In the "Third Moment" of the "Analytic of the Beautiful," Kant claims that the ground of a judgment of taste is the "subjective purposiveness" or "mere form of purposiveness" in its object.<sup>33</sup> This just means that a beautiful object satisfies our subjective purpose of unifying the manifold of our experience without having to be seen as satisfying any more determinate end or purpose, a fortiori without having to be seen as having been produced, whether by a human artificer, nature, or a superhuman artificer of nature, with the intention of satisfying any such end. Thus far, to say that an object has subjective or "merely formal purposiveness"<sup>34</sup> is just to say that it is capable of inducing the harmonious free play of imagination and understanding. Kant's position becomes more problematic, however, when he goes on to equate the *form of purposiveness*, at least in the case of paradigmatic objects of "pure" judgments of taste, with *purposiveness of form*, where form is understood in the sense of the spatiotemporal structure of an object, in contrast to its matter or to its semantic content, if any. This leads to Kant's famous claims that "in painting and sculpture ... the *drawing* is what is essential," while "the colors that illuminate the outline" merely add "charm," and that in music it is "composition" rather than the "agreeable tones of instruments" that constitutes the "proper object of the pure judgment of taste."<sup>35</sup> Although such statements were later taken to make Kant a patron saint of abstract, nonrepresentational art, he provided no argument for them. He also did not allow himself to be constrained by them, getting around them by the simple expedient of treating many beautiful objects, particularly beautiful works of art, which characteristically involve our sense of the harmony among their form, matter, and content, as objects of impure rather than pure judgments of taste. And nowhere does he assume, let alone argue, that objects of pure judgments of taste are in any way more valuable than objects of impure judgments.

<sup>31</sup> CPJ §16, Kant, Ak 5:229–31.

<sup>32</sup> CPJ §45, Kant, Ak 5:306.

<sup>33</sup> CPJ §11, Kant, Ak 5:221.

<sup>34</sup> CPJ §12, Kant, Ak 5:222.

<sup>35</sup> CPJ §14, Kant, Ak 5:225.

The division of the objects of aesthetic response into the beautiful and the sublime had been made canonical by Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, a work that was made widely known in Germany by Moses Mendelssohn's 1758 review<sup>36</sup> even though it was only translated in 1773 by Christian Garve. Kant thus adhered to tradition in providing an account of the experience of the sublime before turning to his theory of fine art. For Kant, the experience of the sublime is not grounded in harmony between imagination and understanding, but rather in a complex but ultimately harmonious relation between the imagination and the faculty of reason, and since reason itself has both a theoretical and a practical application, Kant recognizes two forms of the sublime, the mathematical and the dynamical sublime.<sup>37</sup> In the experience of the mathematical sublime, imagination fails at the attempt to measure something vast and apparently formless by the ordinary technique of reiterating a determinate unit of measurement a determinate number of times, which is distressing to us but at the same time succeeds in giving us a feeling of the whole of such a magnitude, which gives us a profoundly pleasing intimation of the mind's empowerment, through the faculty of reason, "to overstep the limits of sensibility."<sup>38</sup> In the dynamical sublime, objects in nature that are not just vast but also powerful, such as "threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens," and the like, seem threatening to our physical well-being, indeed to all our "goods, health, and life," but at the same time "allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature," namely, the power to govern ourselves by the moral law rather than the liability to be dominated by forces of nature outside us, or, as is far more often the case, within ourselves.<sup>39</sup> This aesthetic experience of the power of our own morally determined will is profoundly pleasing.

Although some modern commentators find Kant's treatment of the sublime implausibly moralistic,<sup>40</sup> Kant's account ensured that the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime would remain a central element of aesthetic theory for another generation. Before we can leave Kant, however, we must look at his theory of fine art and his vastly influential theory of genius as the source of art. Kant's account of art was positively influenced by Baumgarten, who had held

<sup>36</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, "Philosophische Untersuchung des Ursprungs unserer Ideen vom Erhabenen und Schönen," in *Ästhetische Schriften in Auswahl*, ed. Otto F. Best (Dramstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974).

<sup>37</sup> CPJ §24, Kant, Ak 5:247.

<sup>38</sup> CPJ §26, Kant, Ak 5:255.

<sup>39</sup> CPJ §28, Kant, Ak 5:261–2.

<sup>40</sup> See Malcom Budd, "The Sublime in Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38 (1998): 233–50.

that a poem or other work of art is a “clear but confused” form of cognition, that is, in later terminology, a syntactically and semantically dense rather than discrete representation that pleases because of the richness and complexity of the thought that it embodies rather than because of analytical clarity.<sup>41</sup> In Kant’s hands, Baumgarten’s concept of clear but confused cognition was transformed into the notion of an “aesthetic idea.” Kant uses this notion to solve what he initially presents as a paradox about fine art: namely, that any work of art must be intentionally produced and yet, in order to strike us as beautiful, “must nevertheless not seem intentional”: “the purposiveness in its form must still seem to be as free from all constraint by arbitrary rules as if it were a mere product of nature.”<sup>42</sup> Kant then holds that a work of art can satisfy these apparently contradictory requirements if it expresses an “aesthetic idea,” that is, if it conveys an idea, typically a moral idea, and is thus obviously a product of human intention but conveys it “through a representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., *concept*, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.”<sup>43</sup> And such a work, Kant maintains, can only be produced by genius, a talent to produce rich yet harmonious objects going beyond anything that could be produced by mechanically following a rule and that therefore must be regarded as a “natural gift” working through the artist to give “the rule to art.”<sup>44</sup> More specifically, artistic genius (in contrast to Alexander Gerard, whose 1774 *Essay on Genius* had been translated into German as soon as 1776,<sup>45</sup> Kant insists that even the greatest scientific accomplishments do not require this special gift of nature) manifests itself in the invention of both aesthetic ideas, “which contain rich material” for the aim of art, and of “a representation (even if indeterminate) of the material, i.e., of the intuition, for the presentation of this concept.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, in spite of Kant’s earlier insistence on formalism for objects of pure judgments of taste, on his own account a successful work of art always involves a harmony between the matter and content of the work, on the one hand, and its form, on the other. This harmony between form and content in the work must be the product of the free play of the cognitive faculties of the artistic genius who produces the work and

<sup>41</sup> Nelson Goodman’s celebrated *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968) could be seen as a modern successor to Baumgarten, although Goodman purports to be uninterested in the topic of pleasure in aesthetic experience, while Baumgarten clearly thought that the semantic and syntactic density of poetry is precisely what makes it pleasurable.

<sup>42</sup> CPJ §45, Kant, Ak 5:306–7.

<sup>43</sup> CPJ §49, Kant, Ak 5:314.

<sup>44</sup> CPJ §46, Kant, Ak 5:307.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius* (London: W. Strahan, 1774); *Versuch uber das Genie*, trans. Christian Garve (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1776).

<sup>46</sup> CPJ §49, Kant, Ak 5:317.

at the same time induce a feeling of free play in the response of the audience for the work, although Kant does not emphasize the latter point. Finally, Kant offers a classification and ranking of the importance of the various forms of art, based on their potential for expressing aesthetic ideas; on this ranking, “poetry claims the highest rank of all,” music the lowest, with the visual and plastic arts in between.<sup>47</sup> But Kant also emphasizes that this is only one among various possible ways to classify and rank the arts. The project of classifying and ranking the arts would remain a canonical task for aesthetic theory in the following decades.

On the basis of this complex theory of natural beauty, natural sublimity, and artistic beauty, Kant erects an equally complex theory of the relations between aesthetic experience and moral development. Kant makes four main points, which can be divided into two groups, one concerning the contribution of aesthetic experience to our comprehension of morality and its demands, the other concerning the connection between aesthetic experience and our motivation to do what morality requires of us.<sup>48</sup> Kant’s theory of aesthetic ideas as the characteristic content of works of fine art<sup>49</sup> suggests that the experience of art can make moral ideas vivid for us through their connection with rich and lively materials for the imagination. Having moral ideas vividly impressed upon the imagination is presumably beneficial for any normal human being, even if the fundamental concepts and principles of morality are also available to all of us in some more direct form. Second, at the very end of the first half of the third *Critique*, Kant argues that beauty in general is the symbol of the morally good because of analogies between our experience of beauty and the free determination of the will, which is the basis of morality. This argument does not depend upon the assumption that works of art necessarily have moral content, or any content at all.<sup>50</sup> The basis for Kant’s claim here is that since the immediacy, disinterestedness, and universal validity of our pleasure in beauty can only be explained by the “*freedom of the imagination ... in accord with the lawfulness of the understanding*,” the experience of beauty can be interpreted as a symbol of the “freedom of the will ... conceived as the agreement of the latter with itself in accordance with universal laws of reason”;<sup>51</sup> in other words, the experience of the freedom of the imagination in our response to beauty is a palpable experience of freedom and can be used to give us a sense of the freedom of the will in the context of morality, something

<sup>47</sup> CPJ §53, Kant, Ak 5:328–30.

<sup>48</sup> See Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, chap. 1.

<sup>49</sup> At one place he even asserts that natural beauty can also be considered the expression of aesthetic ideas; see CPJ §51, Kant, Ak 5:320.

<sup>50</sup> It is, therefore, just as applicable to natural as to artistic beauty even without the dubious claim that even natural beauty expresses aesthetic ideas.

<sup>51</sup> CPJ §59, Kant, Ak 5:354.

to which we otherwise have, according to Kant's moral theory, only inferential access. Again, presumably any normal human being can benefit from having a vivid image of the possibility of freely determining his own will in accordance with the moral law.

At several other points, Kant explicitly claims that aesthetic experience is conducive to developing habits of acting morally. After his analyses of the beautiful and the sublime, he asserts that "the beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, without interest," while the sublime prepares us "to esteem it, even contrary to our sensible interest."<sup>52</sup> These assertions may seem inconsistent with Kant's general theory of morally praiseworthy motivation, for in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant had famously insisted that only action motivated by respect for the moral law has true moral worth. Thus Kant can hardly mean that feelings of disinterested love and esteem contrary to our sensible and prudential interests generated by our experiences of the beautiful and the sublime can provide our primary motivation for acting as duty commands, in lieu of straightforward respect for the moral law; nor can he mean that such feelings are necessary conditions for morally worthy action – surely he supposes that even a person devoid of all aesthetic feeling must be capable of acting out of respect for the moral law. But Kant also argues in his later *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) that nature affords us feelings that we can use as means to act as we recognize that morality requires us to do,<sup>53</sup> that is to say, naturally occurring feelings that we can use in order to implement our underlying commitment to do what is right for its own sake, and in that work he makes it explicit that aesthetic feelings fall under that rubric: the love of natural beauty in particular is not a necessary condition for acting morally, but "it is still a disposition of sensibility that greatly promotes morality or at least prepares the way for it,"<sup>54</sup> and it is feeling that is to be preserved and cultivated for that reason. A person with a general commitment to doing what morality commands will cultivate aesthetic feelings of love and esteem for nature and other creatures in it precisely because such feelings may make it easier for him to accomplish his overarching intention to do what morality requires of him in all circumstances.

Finally, Kant argues that we have an "intellectual interest" in the existence of natural beauty – a pleasure that must be distinct from our initial pleasure in beauty, of course, because that pleasure is connected to the character of the representation of the beautiful object but not to its existence – because it is crucial

<sup>52</sup> CPJ, General Remark following §29, Kant, Ak 5:267.

<sup>53</sup> Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals* (trans. in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor ([Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], which contains the Ak pagination). "Doctrine of Virtue," §§34–5, Kant, Ak 6:456–7.

<sup>54</sup> *Metaphysics of Morals*, "Doctrine of Virtue," §17, Kant, Ak 6:443.



for morality that we be able to think of our ideas as having “objective reality,” that is, being realizable in nature, and in its production of beautiful objects, even though they are not directly relevant to morality, nature “at least show[s] some trace or give[s] a sign that it contains in itself some sort of ground for assuming a lawful correspondence of its products with our satisfaction.”<sup>55</sup> Kant excludes artistic beauty from this “intellectual interest” because the production or possession of fine art can so easily become a cause of vanity,<sup>56</sup> but since he then argues that works of artistic genius can only be produced through a gift of nature, he should concede that the existence of artistic beauty is also a sign of nature’s correspondence with our own objectives, a fortiori our moral objectives, as long as we can avoid this danger of vanity. Be this as it may, Kant does not explain the moral necessity of evidence that nature is amenable to our own objectives, but he makes clear in the “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment” that although our motivation to do what morality requires of us must be independent of both our mere feelings and our empirical beliefs, nevertheless morality does command us to achieve particular ends in the natural world – for example, to cultivate our own talents and to be beneficent to others in need – and that it would therefore be irrational for us to do what morality requires us to do, or undermine our motivation to do so, if we did not have some reason to believe that we can in fact do what we ought to do.

Although Kant devoted only a single section of the third *Critique* to his theory of intellectual interest in the beautiful, his idea that through the existence of beauty we receive some confirmation that nature is an arena hospitable to the most important of human objectives was to be profoundly influential on his successors from Schelling through Emerson. Before we turn to these figures, however, a word on the more immediate reception of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is in order. Few of the commentaries on the third *Critique* among the flood of literature responding to Kant’s work were of much interest,<sup>57</sup> but one notable exception is the 1800 *Kalligone* by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803).<sup>58</sup> Herder had been a student of Kant in the 1760s but by the 1780s

<sup>55</sup> CPJ §42, Kant, Ak 5:300. Henry E. Allison has chiefly emphasized this part of Kant’s account of the connections between aesthetics and ethics in his treatment in his recent *Kant’s Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chap. 10.

<sup>56</sup> CPJ §42, Kant, Ak 5:298.

<sup>57</sup> In his *German Kantian Bibliography* published in the *Philosophical Review* in 1893–6, Erich Adickes listed 2,825 items on Kant published by the time of his death in 1804!

<sup>58</sup> Reprinted in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Schriften zu Literatur und Philosophie, 1792–1800*, ed. Hans Dietrich Irmscher (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker, 1998). The only accessible study of Herder’s aesthetics is Robert E. Norton, *Herder’s Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), but this work makes only passing reference to the *Kalligone*. The recent volume *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge:

had become the leading proponent of cultural relativism and a passionate opponent of Kant's version of universalism in all branches of philosophy.<sup>59</sup> *Kalligone* is a typically intemperate performance of the late Herder, attacking virtually every claim and distinction in Kant's aesthetic theory and missing the mark as often as it hits it. But when Herder does hit the mark, his blows strike hard. Most generally, the book raises serious doubts about Kant's ready assumption that human cognitive faculties all work the same way and that it is therefore rational to claim at least ideal universal validity for aesthetic judgments: Herder maintains that "the genuine judgment of taste is for others a *declaration*, a *testimony*, but not a *verdict*,"<sup>60</sup> because there are far too many divergences among the constitution and temperament of human organs, human habits, models for the development of taste, and developments in the arts to make it reasonable ever to expect widespread convergence in aesthetic response and judgment.<sup>61</sup> More particularly, Herder casts doubts on Kant's rigid dichotomy between the disinterested pleasure in the beautiful and the interested pleasure of the merely agreeable, arguing that our pleasure in beauty is bodily and visceral as well as intellectual, a physical as well as mental experience of harmony;<sup>62</sup> on Kant's insistence on the separation between nature and fine art, exploiting Kant's own theory of genius to argue that the artist is himself "the most richly gifted of nature's art-products"<sup>63</sup> and then developing a classification of the arts, quite different from Kant's own, which sees the fine arts evolving precisely from those art forms where the line between nature and art is least clear, such as the arts of architecture and horticulture;<sup>64</sup> and on Kant's rigid separation between the beautiful and the sublime, arguing that these two objects of aesthetic experience are not "opposites ... but stems and branches of the same tree; its peak is the most sublime beauty," because nothing is truly beautiful without some element of the activity that is characteristic of the will and thus the sublime.<sup>65</sup> Finally, Herder argues that Kant's theory that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good is far too restrictive; for in his view, much more Romantic than

Cambridge University Press, 2002) includes only one very early (1766) essay on change of taste from Herder's writings in aesthetics.

<sup>59</sup> Kant had written a negative review of the first two volumes of Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784 and 1785, in J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture, trans. F. M. Barnard [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969]) in 1785 (Kant, Ak 8:43–66), and after that Herder's hostility to Kant was unrelenting. See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), chap. 5, especially 149–53, and John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chap. 8, especially 180–8.

<sup>60</sup> *Kalligone*, in Herder, *Schriften zur Literatur und Philosophie*, 843.

<sup>61</sup> *Kalligone*, 844–7.

<sup>62</sup> See *Kalligone*, 688–90.

<sup>63</sup> *Kalligone*, 761.

<sup>64</sup> *Kalligone*, 764–74.

<sup>65</sup> *Kalligone*, 873.

Kant's, virtually everything in nature can be taken as a symbol of some human characteristic, and vice versa; so there can be no single abstract symbol of morality, but natural symbols of morality and moral symbols of nature everywhere.<sup>66</sup>

Herder's criticisms of Kant often fail to observe the niceties of Kant's definitions and arguments, and no doubt Kantian replies could readily be constructed to many of Herder's objections. For example, Kant's specific claim in distinguishing the beautiful and the merely agreeable is that our pleasure in the beautiful does not depend upon nor generate an interest in any exemplar of objects in a determinate class because of the predictable physiological effect of all such objects; and that is quite compatible with Herder's insistence that particular beautiful objects have a beneficial physiological as well as intellectual impact on us. Nevertheless, there is much in Herder that does raise questions about the intellectualism of Kant's interpretation of the experience of beauty and his particularly moralistic interpretation of the symbolic significance of both the beautiful and the sublime, and these questions remain worth considering.

By the time that Herder published *Kalligone* in 1800, however, Schiller and Schelling had already made their own uses of the Kantian legacy and moved debate far beyond the details of Kant's theory. Moreover, there is no evidence that Herder's late book was ever widely read or had much influence on major figures in aesthetics writing after 1800. The transformation of Kant's aesthetics in the 1790s, beginning with Schiller, followed lines of thought quite independent from Herder. Before we turn to those developments, however, we must first consider the other major work in aesthetics published in 1790, Alison's *Essay on Taste*. This is a work that was to have just as much influence on the subsequent history of aesthetics in Britain as Kant's work would have in Germany and that represents an enduring alternative to Kant's approach to aesthetics.

#### HEYDENREICH AND ALISON

Although Kant's transformation of Baumgarten's conception of "clear but confused cognition" into his own theory of aesthetic ideas as well as his distinctive theory of genius would both be profoundly influential in the following decades, his name is nevertheless indelibly associated with his insistence in the "Analytic of the Beautiful" that the proper object of a pure judgment of taste is the mere form of a represented object, in contrast to such elements of its matter as its color or tone, to any semantic content it might have, and to any "charms and emotions"<sup>67</sup> that might be occasioned by either or both of the latter. But Kant's

<sup>66</sup> *Kalligone*, 951–64.

<sup>67</sup> "Reize und Rührungen," CPJ §13, Kant, Ak 5:223.

intellectualist and unemotional conception of aesthetic experience, which had so incensed Herder, was not shared even by his most immediate contemporaries. Two other works also published in 1790 decisively rejected such a conception. In Germany, the prolific Leipzig professor, Karl Heinrich Heydenreich (1764–1801), although he was strongly influenced by Kant's practical philosophy, published *System of Aesthetics*<sup>68</sup> a few months after the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, taking a very different approach from Kant's work. Like Kant, Heydenreich rejected the rationalists' conception of beauty as the sensuous representation of perfection as well as Moritz's conception of beauty as the purely internal perfection of a work of art. But instead of providing a single alternative to such views, as does Kant's conception of beauty as what induces the harmony of the cognitive faculties, Heydenreich initially rejects any attempt to provide a single explanation of beauty, arguing that there are beauties connected with the "immediate impressions of objects on our senses," beauties connected with the "contingent associations of certain images and representations with certain objects," beauties whose "efficacy rests on an essential relation of certain forms and tones with certain conditions of the human being," and beauties that "arouse enjoyment through relation to certain objects, images, representations, thoughts, and actions to the laws of the understanding or speculative or practical reason."<sup>69</sup> In the case of the fine arts, however, Heydenreich claims that works please specifically because of their satisfaction of the human need for feeling or sentiment; here his main claim is that "as a cognitive being, the human being possess a necessary drive to expand his knowledge and to communicate it to his fellow human beings; as a sensitive being, a drive to exhibit and communicate his feelings [*Empfindungen*]. . . . Every work of fine art is thus the exhibition of a determinate condition of sensitivity [*Empfindsamkeit*]."<sup>70</sup> Charm and emotion are thus not merely incidental to art, merely to be tolerated as long as they do not interfere with our purer enjoyment of abstract form; the expression of emotion by the artist and its communication to the audience for art are essential to our enjoyment of art because the expression and communication of emotion are essential to our enjoyment of life itself. Even though Heydenreich praises the recently published *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in a note tacked on to the end of his foreword, his work really stands in the very different aesthetic tradition of the Abbé Du Bos.

<sup>68</sup> Karl Heinrich Heydenreich, *System der Ästhetik: Erster Band* (Leipzig: Göschen, 1790), facsimile reprint in the series *Texte zum literarischen Leben um 1800*, vol. 5, ed. Ernst Weber (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1978). In spite of its being labeled "Volume One," no further parts of the work were published; perhaps Heydenreich's early death prevented the continuation of the work.

<sup>69</sup> Heydenreich, *System der Ästhetik*, 97–103.

<sup>70</sup> Heydenreich, *System der Ästhetik*, 150–1.

Although Heydenreich seems to have influenced Friedrich Schiller, his name quickly faded into obscurity. A far more durable and influential defense of the centrality of emotion in aesthetic response was provided in the same year by the Scot Archibald Alison (1757–1839) in his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*.<sup>71</sup> (In fact, Heydenreich himself produced an annotated German translation of Alison's work in 1792.) Although Alison has attracted limited attention recently,<sup>72</sup> his work was clearly received as the summation of eighteenth-century aesthetics in nineteenth-century Britain, and his emphasis on the association between emotion and imagination in aesthetic experience continued to be influential on Mill half a century later and to reverberate even beyond Mill.

Alison adopts Burke's canonical distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, supposing that there is a characteristic kind of pleasure associated with each of these. But in spite of an initial promise to do so, he never provides a detailed analysis of this contrast,<sup>73</sup> and it plays a minor role in his argument. What is central to Alison's thought is the idea that any aesthetic experience involves the experience of some particular emotion in association with an exercise of the imagination, taking the form of a train of associated ideas, with the pleasure that we take in feeling an emotion being combined with the distinctive pleasure that we feel in the exercise of the imagination to produce a complex of pleasurable emotion. Alison's stress on the twofold character of aesthetic experience can be seen as an unintended alternative to Kant's reduction of pure aesthetic response to the enjoyment of the exercise of the imagination alone as well as an intentional rejection of the position of Hutcheson. Alison's introduction announces his intention to demonstrate that the "EFFECT which is produced upon the Mind, when the Emotions of Beauty or Sublimity are felt ... is very different from the determination of a SENSE; that it is not in fact a Simple, but a Complex Emotion; that it involves in all cases, 1<sup>st</sup>, the production of some Simple Emotion, or the exercise of some moral Affection; and 2<sup>dly</sup>, the consequent Excitement of a peculiar Exercise of the Imagination ... and that the *peculiar* pleasure of the BEAUTIFUL or the SUBLIME is only felt when these two effects are conjoined, and the

<sup>71</sup> Citations from Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute and Archibald Constable, 1811).

<sup>72</sup> A rather hostile account can be found in George Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), chap. 3, 55–84. More useful discussions can be found in Peter Kivy, *The Seventh Sense: A Study of Francis Hutcheson's Aesthetics and Its Influence in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1976; rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 11, and Dabney Townsend, "Alison on Aesthetic Experience and Expression," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 28 (1988): 132–44.

<sup>73</sup> Steven Jauss has convincingly argued that Alison never published the whole of the work he originally intended: "Associationism and Taste in Archibald Alison's Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (2006): 415–28.

Complex Emotion produced.”<sup>74</sup> The ensuing argument then uses the traditional distinction between the beautiful and the sublime for purposes of classification, assuming that the particular simple emotion presented by any particular object but then enriched by the play of imagination associated with it can be subsumed under one or the other of these rubrics by standard criteria – thus, if the leading emotion in a work has any association with danger, then it is an instance of the sublime,<sup>75</sup> while if it is associated with something more peaceable, then it is an instance of the beautiful<sup>76</sup> – but this distinction is not central to Alison’s argument. Instead, the bulk of his work is devoted to displaying the variety of properties of objects that can express and arouse a simple emotion and the variety of mechanisms of the imagination that can enrich the former and raise it to the level of a complex emotion. Alison explores a variety of sensory modalities, such as both sight and sound, and a variety of types of objects, both natural and artificial, but with the human form at the center of all, to show how they may express a variety of emotions through a variety of imaginative associations. Two themes are central to Alison’s argument. First, although he is often lampooned as a simple-minded associationist, who reduces all the work of the imagination to arbitrary associations of ideas, he is clear that the imagination works through a variety of forms of association, ranging from those that are idiosyncratic to an individual because of his unique history, through those that are common to a group because of their shared history and circumstances, to those that are common to human beings in general because of their shared nature and conditions of existence. Second, he argues that since aesthetic pleasure revolves around the imaginative enrichment of simple emotions, but emotions are ultimately products of the human mind, our pleasure in the beauty and sublimity of material objects is ultimately a pleasure in them as signs of “qualities of mind”: “The conclusion, therefore, in which I wish to rest is, THAT THE BEAUTY AND SUBLIMITY WHICH IS FELT IN THE VARIOUS APPEARANCES OF MATTER, ARE FINALLY TO BE ASCRIBED TO THEIR EXPRESSION OF MIND; OR TO THEIR BEING, EITHER DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, THE SIGNS OF THOSE QUALITIES OF MIND WHICH ARE FITTED, BY THE CONSTITUTION OF OUR NATURE, TO AFFECT US WITH PLEASING OR INTERESTING EMOTION.”<sup>77</sup> The complexity of Alison’s conception of the mechanisms of the imagination is then reflected in the catalog

<sup>74</sup> Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 1:xxii–xxiii.

<sup>75</sup> For example, Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 1:193.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 1:213.

<sup>77</sup> Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 2:423. This conclusion firmly connects Alison’s position to that of Shaftesbury at the beginning of the century, who said even of the beauty of design, “What is it you admire but mind, or the effect of mind?” (“The Moralists,” pt. III, §II, in Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 322).

of forms of association between properties of matter and aspects of mind leading up to this conclusion. He argues that “qualities of matter” can be expressive of “qualities of mind” both directly, as “immediate signs of the POWERS or capacities of mind” and “as the signs of all those AFFECTIONS, or dispositions of mind, which we love, or with which we are formed to sympathize,”<sup>78</sup> and “indirectly,” or by means of less universal and less permanent relations, of which he lists four types: shared “experience, when peculiar forms or appearances of matter are considered as the *means* or *instruments* by which those feelings or affects of mind are produced with which we sympathize”; “from analogy or resemblance,” that is, “that resemblance which has everywhere been felt between the qualities of matter and of mind”; “from association (in the proper sense of that term), when by means of education, of fortune, or of accident, material objects are connected with pleasing or interesting qualities of mind; and from this connection become forever afterwards expressive of them”; and finally, “from *individual* association; when certain qualities or appearances of matter, are connected with our own private affections or remembrances.”<sup>79</sup> By countenancing individual as well as shared associations as enjoyable forms of the exercise of the imagination, Alison undermines any claim that any genuine pleasure in beauty or sublimity must be sharable among all human beings and thus that all proper judgments of taste are universally valid. He makes this perfectly clear in his discussion of the beauty of the human form, conceptions of which will differ in different times and places;<sup>80</sup> but, in contrast to Kant, he is prepared to sacrifice the ideal of universal validity to the actual diversity of human experience.

After his first essay, on the essential complexity of aesthetic response, Alison devotes the remainder of his two volumes to a lengthy second essay, which concerns the various objects of aesthetic response under the title “Of the Sublimity and Beauty of the Material World.” Here he first discusses the sublimity and beauty of what Kant would have regarded as the matter of representation, namely, sounds and colors; then the beauty and sublimity of the various forms of material objects in general; and finally, the “Beauty of the Human Countenance and Form.” Instead of insisting that only form and not matter is aesthetically significant, like Kant, Alison argues that both material and formal properties of objects can express emotions in ways that stimulate our imaginations. His discussion of form, like his initial discussion of the complexity of aesthetic response, is clearly targeted at Hutcheson, but at William Hogarth as well.<sup>81</sup> Alison is prepared to

<sup>78</sup> Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 2:418–19.

<sup>79</sup> Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 2:419–22.

<sup>80</sup> See Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 2:298–9.

<sup>81</sup> In *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753; modern edition by Ronald Paulson [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997]), the painter and illustrator Hogarth had notoriously attempted to reduce all visual beauty to variations on a single form, that of a serpentine line.

admit that some simple forms directly produce favorable responses, although he is not prepared to restrict such forms to a single one such as Hogarth's serpentine line. However, he argues that most of the forms that please us are complex, not simple, and then, in contrast to Hutcheson, he argues that what pleases us in complex forms is not usually the sheer fact of their uniformity amid variety (which every object possesses to some degree or other), but rather the variety of emotions and characters that complex forms can express through both their several elements and the combinations of these. "In all the different kinds of ORNAMENTAL Forms, in the same manner, instead of there being any one determinate proportion of Uniformity and Variety beautiful, there are, in fact, as many varieties of beautiful Composition, as there are varieties of Character; and the rule by which we judge of Beauty, in every particular case, is by the correspondence of the Composition to the character which the Form is intended to express."<sup>82</sup> Thus such different emotions or "Characters" as splendor, magnificence, gaiety, delicacy, and melancholy can become associated with different forms and be combined in different ways to produce different effects. How we respond to different instantiations of the abstract relation of uniformity amid variety will in fact depend upon our particular emotional associations: for example, "A greater proportion of Uniformity distinguishes [the Composition] when destined to the Expression of Simplicity, Magnificence, or Melancholy, and a greater proportion of Variety, when destined to the Expression of Elegance or Gaiety."<sup>83</sup> The inference to be drawn from Alison's argument is that both the matter and the form of represented objects can express emotions and engage the imagination through trains of association, although since forms are themselves combinations of more material elements, forms may offer a greater range of expressive possibilities. But there is no fundamental difference between the aesthetic effects of matter and form.

In this regard, Alison's theory seems more responsive to our experience than Kant's, or at least than the restrictive formalism of the "Analytic of the Beautiful." When it comes to the connection between aesthetics and morality, however, Kant's complex catalog of the several ways in which aesthetic experience can indirectly support moral development may be preferable to Alison's blunter account. For Alison, the "emotions of taste" are a complex of simple emotions and the special pleasures of the imagination, but since the simple emotions with which the latter are combined are themselves typically morally significant emotions, it is only natural for him to assume that "the emotions of taste are blended with MORAL sentiment; and that one of the greatest pleasures of which we are

<sup>82</sup> Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 2:31.

<sup>83</sup> Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 2:32.



susceptible, is made finally subservient to moral improvement.”<sup>84</sup> He then takes it to be obvious that the aesthetic arousal of emotion will have a beneficial affect on our moral disposition:

If it is from their natural Beauty that [works of Art] affect us, from their being expressive of fineness, delicacy, gentleness, majesty, solemnity, &c. they then awaken corresponding emotions in our bosoms, and give exercise to some of the most virtuous feelings of our nature. If it is from their relative Beauty, from their being expressive of invention, genius, taste, or fancy in the artist, they produce effects no less important to our intellectual development. They raise us to those high conceptions of the powers and the attainments of the human mind, which is the foundation of every noble ambition. They extend our views of the capacity of our nature for whatever is great or excellent; and whatever be the pursuits from which we come, they stimulate us to higher exertions in them, by the prospect of the genius which has been exhibited, and the excellence which has been attained.<sup>85</sup>

Here Alison assumes both that the expression of emotions in a work of art necessarily arouses the same emotion in the observer of that work and that such arousal of emotions is by itself morally beneficial. He makes no mention of the need for moral principles by which to regulate the influence of such emotions. Needless to say, Kant would not have joined him in these assumptions. Kant’s suggestion of ways in which aesthetic experience may assist us in the exercise of our moral principles without themselves being either indispensable or sufficient for moral conduct seems appropriately more cautious.

### SCHILLER

Although Alison’s *Essays* were to have an enduring impact on British aesthetics, that impact was not as immediate and explosive as the impact of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in Germany. The first major figure to have absorbed the force of Kant’s work was the poet, playwright, historian, and essayist Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805). Although Schiller wrote several theoretical essays during his earlier years as a dramatist, the majority of his influential essays on aesthetics and morality were written in a few short years of intense activity from 1793 to 1795. The focus here will be on three of Schiller’s works: a series of letters from January and February 1793 to Gottfried Christian Körner outlining a proposed book to have been entitled “Kallias or on Beauty,” which remained unpublished, but was Schiller’s only extensive discussion of the nature of beauty itself (the correspondence was first published in 1847); the profoundly influential *Letters on*

<sup>84</sup> Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 2:435.

<sup>85</sup> Alison, *Essays on Taste*, 2:438–9.

the *Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, published in the first half of 1795 in Schiller's journal *Die Horen* (The Seasons), which provide Schiller's major statement on the relation between aesthetic experience and the moral and political development of modern man; and the essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, published in *Die Horen* later in 1795, a contrast between ancient and modern art that would have a tremendous impact on the Romantic theorists, August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, and on the aesthetic historiographies of Schelling and Hegel.<sup>86</sup>

Schiller begins the "Kallias" letters with a classification of theories of beauty, dividing theories by the contrast between objective and subjective ones – that is, theories that locate beauty in the object or merely in the subject responding to the object – and between rational or sensible ones – that is, those that make reason essential to the perception of beauty and those that make sensibility essential. There are therefore four possible types of theories of beauty: the two most common types of theory in the eighteenth century, namely, the "sensible subjective" type, according to which beauty is purely a matter of sensible response to an object, typified by the theory of Burke among the empiricists, and the "objective rational" type, according to which beauty is an objective perfection of objects perceived by reason, typified by the Wolffians Baumgarten and Mendelssohn "and the whole crowd of perfection-men"; and two less common types, namely, the "subjective rational" theory advanced by Kant and the "objective sensible" type to be developed by Schiller himself, according to which beauty consists in "freedom in the appearance of an object," in the "great idea of self-determination [that] beams back at us from certain appearances of nature."<sup>87</sup> In fact, Schiller's contrast between Kant's theory and his own does justice to neither. Kant's theory does regard beauty as "subjective" in the sense of being dependent upon the

<sup>86</sup> The translation of Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), includes a detailed introduction and commentary. A letter-by-letter commentary is the misleadingly named book by Patrick T. Murray, *The Development of German Aesthetic Theory from Kant to Schiller* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994). Other useful works on Schiller's aesthetic theory include S. S. Kerry, *Schiller's Writings on Aesthetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961); R. D. Miller, *Schiller and the Ideal of Freedom: A Study of Schiller's Philosophical Works with Chapters on Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); J. M. Ellis, *Schiller's "Kalliasbriefe" and the Study of His Aesthetic Theory* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976); Juliet Sychrava, *Schiller to Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and T. J. Reed, *Schiller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Savile, *Aesthetic Reconstructions*, chaps. 7 and 8, and Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), chap. 4, and *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>87</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Kallias oder über die Schönheit: Briefe an Körner*, in *Schillers Werke, Vierter Band: Schriften*, intr. Hans Meyer and Golo Mann (Frankfurt: Insel, 1966) (references to this work will be indicated by Schiller, *Werke*); the classification of theories of beauty is in the letter of January 25, 1793, Schiller, *Werke* 4:75, and the two characterizations of beauty are from the letter of February 18, Schiller, *Werke* 4:84.

human response to objects, although he permits us to speak of it as if it were objective because of its universal validity,<sup>88</sup> but it is hardly fair to call Kant's theory merely "rational" when he insists that our response to beauty consists in the free play between the understanding and the imagination. And while Schiller's theory does attempt a more determinate characterization of the beautiful object than Kant's provides, his claim that a beautiful object is one that manifests the *appearance* of freedom can hardly eliminate a reference to the human response to the object – such an object appears free *to us* – and it would also be natural to suppose that our reason as well as our sensibility must be involved in our response to such an object. However, it would be fair for Schiller to claim that he provides a more substantive account of the beautiful object than Kant does, for while Kant attributes "subjective" or "formal purposiveness" to a beautiful object solely on the basis of its ability to induce the harmonious free play of imagination and understanding in us,<sup>89</sup> Schiller does give an account of beauty that, while inspired by Kant's, is more informative than it, if also for that reason more controversial.

Schiller is inspired by Kant's theory of freedom as the self-determination of the will in accord with a law that it gives itself, or with the thought that "*Pure self-determination in general is the form of practical reason.*" Beauty then consists in the "analogy of an object with the form of practical reason, not freedom in the fact, but merely *freedom in the appearance, autonomy in the appearance.*"<sup>90</sup> And what this "self-determination in a thing insofar as it reveals itself in intuition"<sup>91</sup> in turn means is that a beautiful object is one that *appears* to be self-determined, or to have a form that expresses its own nature or principle, not the pressure of some entirely external law or force: the object appears "to be what it is through itself"<sup>92</sup> or to possess a "pure harmony of its inner essence with its form" due to a "*rule that is at one and the same time followed and given by the thing itself.*"<sup>93</sup> Schiller associates his account with that of Karl Philipp Moritz, claiming that it is precisely its appearance of self-determination that makes a beautiful object seem perfect or complete in itself,<sup>94</sup> but he is also clearly trying to give an account that would expand upon Kant's theory by more fully describing what it is in the appearance of a beautiful object that occasions a free play between our imagination and our intellect: the appearance of the object works through our imagination, but it engages our concept of self-determination. Schiller also gives a

<sup>88</sup> See CPJ §6, Kant, Ak 5:211.

<sup>89</sup> CPJ §12, Kant, Ak 5:222.

<sup>90</sup> Letter of February 8, 1793, Schiller, Werke 4:81.

<sup>91</sup> Letter of February 18, 1793, Schiller, Werke 4:84.

<sup>92</sup> Letter of February 18, 1793, Schiller, Werke 4:85.

<sup>93</sup> Letter of February 23, 1793, Schiller, Werke 4:99.

<sup>94</sup> Letter of February 23, 1793, Schiller, Werke 4:99.

homely illustration of what he means by the appearance of self-determination in an object: “A vase, considered as something corporeal, is subject to gravity, but the effects of gravity, if they are not to deny *the nature of a vase*, must be modified through the form of the vase, i.e., particularly determined and made necessary through this special form.” Thus, a vase that is weighted down by a heavy belly appears to be dominated by the force of gravity, but a vase that has a more soaring and elegant form appears to transform the effects of gravity into an expression of its own distinctive nature.<sup>95</sup> This principle holds not merely for artifacts, but for natural beauty as well: “we perceive beauty wherever *mass is completely dominated by form* and (in the realms of animals and plants) by the living forces (in which I place the autonomy of the organic).”<sup>96</sup> Remarks like these suggest that Schiller is also attempting to provide a philosophical foundation for the aesthetic sensibility of his great associate Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, for whom the idea of the self-expression of the characteristic form of a mineral or organism was the key to beauty – the Goethe who wrote, for example, that “the living has the gift of accommodating itself to the most manifold conditions of external influences and yet not surrendering a certain decisively accomplished self-sufficiency.”<sup>97</sup> But Schiller’s central assumption is that since, as Kant had argued, the preservation and promotion of freedom are the only activities that have unconditional value, so the sensible appearance of freedom is the most gratifying form of appearance that we can experience.

As Schiller makes clear later in the letter of February 23, his theory does not require a rejection of traditional terms of criticism so much as a reconception of their significance. “Purposiveness, order, proportion, perfection – properties, in which it has so long been believed that beauty is to be found – have nothing at all to do with it. But where order, proportion, etc. belong to the *nature* of a thing,” there they are beautiful, “because they are inseparable from the nature of the thing.”<sup>98</sup> In his final letter, five days later, he also shows how his theory can be applied to the fine arts by a subtle transformation of traditional terms of criticism. Like Kant, he assumes without need for argument that paradigmatic works of fine art are representational, thus have both a matter or content and a form through which this content is represented. Beauty in art thus consists in both the “beauty of the choice or of the material – imitation of natural beauty” – and the “beauty of the representation or the form – imitation of nature.” But in accordance with

<sup>95</sup> Letter of February 23, 1793, Schiller, *Werke* 4:95.

<sup>96</sup> Letter of February 23, 1793, Schiller, *Werke* 4:96.

<sup>97</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen, Gott und Nature*, no. 29; in *Goethes Werke*, vol. 12, eds. Werner Weber and Hans Joachim Schrimpf (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1953), 369.

<sup>98</sup> Letter of February 23, 1793, Schiller, *Werke* 4:102.

his own account, beauty in each of these elements consists particularly in the appearance of freedom, and beauty in the work as a whole consists in the appearance of a free or self-determined harmony between the two elements: thus, "A product of nature is beautiful when it appears free in its suitability for art," and "A product of art is beautiful when it freely represents a product of nature."<sup>99</sup> Or as he puts it on the next page, in a beautiful work of art the thing represented must be "determined through itself or so appear," and the representation of the thing must "come forth to the imagination as determined through the thing itself."<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, in a beautiful work of art "the *matter* (the nature of that which is imitating) must lose itself in the *form* (of that which is imitated), the *body* in the *idea*, the *reality* in the appearance."<sup>101</sup> Schiller then gives a brief sketch of what these claims imply for the plastic arts, such as architecture, gardening, and dance; for painting and drawing; and for verbal arts such as drama and poetry. Presumably he would have developed these hints had he completed the projected book.

On Schiller's theory, then, our pleasure in beauty is grounded in the fact that beauty consists in the appearance of that to which we ascribe the highest moral value, namely, self-determination. But in the "Kallias" letters he does not explicitly claim that the experience of beauty is for that reason valuable, let alone indispensable for moral and political self-development. That claim is left for the 1795 *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*. This work, the proximate cause of which was the French Revolution's failure to make a successful transition from tyranny to stable liberty, but the ultimate objective of which was to rebut Plato's argument for the expulsion of the poets from his ideal republic, is perhaps the most unconditional assertion of the necessity of aesthetics for morality in the Western philosophical and critical tradition. Schiller's thesis, simply put, is that "it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom."<sup>102</sup>

Schiller begins the *Aesthetic Education* with a famous analysis of alienation in modern life, "where the various faculties appear as separate in practice as they are distinguished by the psychologist in theory, and we see not merely individuals, but whole classes of men, developing but one part of their potentialities, while of the rest, as in stunted growths, only vestigial traces remain"<sup>103</sup> — an analysis that would be transmitted through Hegel and Marx to many of the intellectual and political movements of the twentieth century.<sup>104</sup> Such alienation or

<sup>99</sup> Letter of February 28, 1793, Schiller, *Werke* 4:112.

<sup>100</sup> Letter of February 28, 1793, Schiller, *Werke* 4:113.

<sup>101</sup> Letter of February 28, 1793, Schiller, *Werke* 4:114.

<sup>102</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Second Letter, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Sixth Letter, 33.

<sup>104</sup> Schiller himself was in turn evidently inspired in his analysis by Adam Smith's famous description of the division of labor; see especially the Sixth Letter, 35.

fragmentation, in Schiller's view, stands in the way of the realization of freedom in a moral and political state of freedom, because such a state requires both that each of its citizens be a whole of his parts and that all of its citizens constitute a whole in which each remains free – "Wholeness of character must therefore be present in any people capable, and worthy, of exchanging a state of compulsion for a state of freedom."<sup>105</sup> More concretely, "If man is to retain his power of choice and yet, at the same time, be a reliable link in the chain of causality, this can only be brought about through both [of his] motive forces, inclination and duty, producing completely identical results in the world of phenomena ... that is to say, through impulse being sufficiently in harmony with reason to qualify as universal legislator."<sup>106</sup> Schiller further describes what is needed in terms of the development of the capacity for sound moral judgment: the individual needs to learn not to judge "all experience whatsoever by one particular fragment of experience,"<sup>107</sup> namely, his own; more generally, both within and among all the individuals who are to constitute a whole, the power of the imagination to respond to individual needs and desires has to be brought into harmony with the power of reason to conceive of universal principles of conduct. There are really two thoughts here: for the achievement of morality, people need to learn how to give both general principles and particular circumstances their proper weight in determining courses of action; and people have to learn how to balance general demands and their own desires in order to be motivated to do what the balance between general principle and particular circumstance tells them they ought to do. Schiller's claim is then that it is only through the experience of art that modern man can learn to achieve these harmonies.

At this stage of his argument Schiller invokes the new psychology of Kant's follower Karl Leonhard Reinhold and perhaps the emerging philosophy of Johann Fichte rather than his own Kantian analysis of beauty from the "Kallias" letters. Although his initial analysis suggests that the problem of fragmentation of human potential is a particularly modern problem, Schiller actually implies that it is an ever-present possibility in human nature<sup>108</sup> because the general and particular are both aspects of human nature, what Schiller calls "person" and "condition";<sup>109</sup> and, moreover, there are always two "drives" in human nature, the "sensuous drive," or drive toward the material and particular,<sup>110</sup> and the "formal drive," the drive to "bring harmony into the diversity of one's appearing and to

<sup>105</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Fourth Letter, 23.

<sup>106</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Fourth Letter, 17.

<sup>107</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Fourth Letter, 39.

<sup>108</sup> See Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Tenth Letter, 71.

<sup>109</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Eleventh Letter, 73.

<sup>110</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Twelfth Letter, 79.

affirm his person among all the changes of his condition.”<sup>111</sup> Each of these drives is necessary for moral action, which requires the application of principles to particular circumstances; but if either drive is hyperactive then we’re in trouble: if the sensuous drive prevails at the expense of the formal drive, then our actions will be shortsighted and selfish, but if the formal drive prevails at the expense of the sensuous drive, then our principles can become tyrannical ideologies that seek abstract goals at any cost in individual human happiness and life – what happened when the French revolution degenerated into the Terror.<sup>112</sup> These two drives need to be kept in balance, and that, Schiller supposes, returning to a Kantian inspiration, can only come about through the exercise of a third drive, the “play drive,” in which the general seems to determine the particular yet also the particular seems to determine the general, and in which both contingency and constraint are annulled.<sup>113</sup> The object of the play drive, in turn, is “living form” or “beauty”:<sup>114</sup> here is where the analysis of beauty in the *Kallias* letters as the image of free self-determination is presupposed. Schiller’s central claim, then, is that since it is only through the play drive that the sensuous and form drives can be harmonized, and only in the experience of beauty that the play drive is fully realized, it is only through the experience of beauty that the sensuous and form drives can be harmonized, which is in turn the precondition for the moral development of mankind.

Schiller further argues we need two forms of beauty, “tensing beauty” and “melting beauty,” depending upon whether our form drive needs to be strengthened to avoid domination by the particular or relaxed to avoid excessive generality.<sup>115</sup> One might assume that this is Schiller’s way of incorporating the traditional distinction between the sublime and the beautiful into his argument, but Schiller does not suggest this, nor does his earlier essay “On the Sublime”

<sup>111</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Twelfth Letter, 81. The particular idea of a “drive for form” and a “drive” for matter seems to come from Reinhold’s *Attempt at a Theory of the Human Capacity for Representation* (Prague: Widtmann, 1789) (modern ed. Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, vol. 1, ed. Ernst-Otto Onnasch [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2010]), although it is just possible that Schiller might have been more directly influenced by Fichte’s 1794 Jena lectures and first publication of his *Theory of Science* (both can be found in *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky [Stuttgart: Frommann, 1962–]) with its idea of the mind’s “drive” to overcome the nonmind, which was itself a response to Reinhold, to have reconceived of Kant’s distinction between the form and matter of cognition in terms of two drives. On Reinhold and Fichte on this issue, see Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 230–1.

<sup>112</sup> See Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Fourth Letter, 19.

<sup>113</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Fourteenth Letter, 97.

<sup>114</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Fifteenth Letter, 101.

<sup>115</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Sixteenth Letter, 111–15.

anticipate the analytical framework of the *Aesthetic Education*.<sup>116</sup> He does strike a more explicitly Kantian note in the Twenty-First Letter, when he adopts Kant's insight that it is precisely the disinterestedness of aesthetic response, and the concomitant freedom of the aesthetic object from explicit purposiveness, that allows the experience of beauty to become a morally significant experience of freedom. Schiller writes that "those people are entirely right who declare beauty, and the disposition that it induces in use, to be completely indifferent and unfruitful as regards either *knowledge* or *character* ... beauty produces no particular result whatsoever, neither for understanding nor for the will; it accomplishes no particular purpose, neither intellectual nor moral"; but he then adds that "precisely thereby something infinite is achieved," for as soon as we recall that we were derived of freedom "by the one-sided constraint of nature in the field of sensation and by the exclusive authority of reason in the realm of thought, then we must consider the power that is given back" to us "in the aesthetic disposition as the highest of all gifts, the gift of humanity" itself.<sup>117</sup> Of course, for Kant the disinterestedness of our pleasure in beauty made beauty merely a *symbol* of the morally good, acquaintance with which is presumably conducive to the realization of virtue, while for Schiller acquaintance with beauty through aesthetic education seems to be both necessary and sufficient for the development of virtue and the political realization of freedom that he assumes must follow from that.<sup>118</sup> Schiller was closer to Kant than any theorist who would follow, but even so he transformed Kant's indirect and therefore at least plausible connection between aesthetics and morality into one that is far more rigid and for that reason more dubious.

No discussion of Schiller can omit mention of his essay "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," which was even more directly influential than *Aesthetic Education*. The central claim of this essay, which can be regarded as Schiller's contribution to the long "quarrel between the ancients and the moderns" that had begun in seventeenth-century France, is that the ancients were not conscious of any gap between themselves and nature and thus were naïve or childlike in their absorption in and identification with it, whereas the modern mind is inevitably conscious of the gap between itself and nature. This has a twofold effect: on the one hand, it leads to sentimentality, a longing for the absorption in nature that the ancients had but we can never quite recapture;<sup>119</sup> on the other hand, it gives

<sup>116</sup> See "On the Sublime," originally published in another of Schiller's journals, *Die Neue Thalia*, in 1793; translation in Friedrich Schiller, *Essays*, eds. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993), 22–44. In classical literature, *Thalia* was the name for the muse of comedy and light verse, as well as for one of the Graces.

<sup>117</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Twenty-First Letter, 147.

<sup>118</sup> See Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, Twenty-Fifth Letter, 189.

<sup>119</sup> Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," in *Essays*, 192.



us space for the formation of moral ideals that go beyond what is historically actual at any moment and thus allows for a vision of moral improvement that the ancients did not attain. In the modern “condition of culture, where [the] harmonious cooperation of the human being’s entire nature is merely an idea, the elevation of actuality to the ideal or, what comes to the same, *the portrayal of the ideal is what necessarily makes the poet*.”<sup>120</sup> While both the *Aesthetic Education* and the present essay might seem to begin with a lament for the lost innocence of antiquity, Schiller makes it clear that mankind cannot achieve virtue and justice by returning to some Golden Age, and while he praises those forms of modern sentimental literature that makes us aware of the possibility of the ideal, even forms such as satire that do so by emphasizing how far the actual falls short of the ideal,<sup>121</sup> he is harsh on those forms of pseudonaïve poetry, such as modern pastoral, that present ancient innocence as if it were something to which we could simply return.<sup>122</sup> Here Schiller’s judgment seems more sure than in the overconfident *Aesthetic Education*.

Schiller’s way of distinguishing between the ancient and the modern sensibility would have an enormous influence on the general philosophical historiography and the histories of art envisioned by Schelling and Hegel, as well as on the criticism of the Romantics, such as the Schlegel brothers and Novalis (Friedrich Hardenburg). Schelling will be the chief representative of the Romantic movement here.<sup>123</sup>

### SCHELLING AND SOME FOLLOWERS

No philosopher of this or indeed any period made art more central to his philosophical project than Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854). Schelling, in the first part of the 1790s a fellow student and friend of Friedrich Hölderlin and Hegel at the Tübinger Stift, the theological school of the university in Tübingen, was precociously prolific, and a few pages can hardly give an overview of his life’s work.<sup>124</sup> The following comments will focus chiefly on his *System of Transcendental*

<sup>120</sup> Schiller, “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” 201.

<sup>121</sup> See Schiller, “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” 206.

<sup>122</sup> Schiller, “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” 238–9.

<sup>123</sup> For discussions of the Schlegels and Novalis, see Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), lectures 14–17; Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, chap. 2; Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chap. 6; and Beiser, *German Idealism*, pt. 3.

<sup>124</sup> For some surveys of Schelling’s philosophy, see Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985); Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993); Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, chap. 7; and Beiser, *German Idealism*, pt. 4, 465–595. Manfred Frank provides a detailed account of Schelling’s aesthetics in *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*, lectures 9–13, 137–230. The place of

*Idealism*<sup>125</sup> of 1800 and on the lectures on *The Philosophy of Art*<sup>126</sup> that he gave in Jena in 1802–3 and again in Würzburg in 1803–4.<sup>127</sup>

From the outset of his career, Schelling was concerned to resolve what he considered paradoxes in the philosophy of Kant. Like many other young men in the heady 1790s, Schelling was impressed by Kant's "Copernican" revolution, the idea that the structure and order of nature must be in some sense a product of human thought if we are to explain the possibility of our knowledge of it. At the same time, however, Schelling held that Kant owed an explanation of the origin of human subjectivity itself and that in any such explanation human subjectivity must somehow originate in nature. But how could nature be a product of human thought while human thought is a product of nature? Schelling also alluded to Kant's third "Antinomy of Pure Reason," Kant's formulation of the problem of free will and determinism, to express the paradox: on the one hand, human thought must be free and spontaneous if it is to represent nature; on the other, it must be itself a product of nature if it is to represent nature. But if thought is a product of nature, then it is determined by natural laws, not free. How can it be both? In the first major stage of his philosophy, represented by the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*<sup>128</sup> of 1797 as well as the *System of Transcendental Idealism* published three years later, Schelling tried to resolve such paradoxes by representing nature as the product of unconscious thought, so that the emergence of thought from nature could be reinterpreted as the transition from unconscious to conscious thought. The *Philosophy of Nature* interpreted nature as the product of unconscious thought, and the *System of Transcendental Idealism* described the emergence of consciousness from unconsciousness, thus anticipating the developmental phenomenology of mind to be published by Hegel seven years later.<sup>129</sup> The gist of this line of thought is summed up in a passage like this:

A completed theory of nature would be one in virtue of which the whole of nature resolved itself into a single intelligence. The dead and unconscious products of nature are only unsuccessful efforts of nature to reflect itself, and so-called dead nature is

Schelling's aesthetics in literary theory is discussed by James T. Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), chap. 20.

<sup>125</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Lauchlan Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978); selections concerning aesthetics previously translated by Albert Hofstadter in Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty* (New York: Modern Library, 1964).

<sup>126</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>127</sup> Although these lectures were published only posthumously, by Schelling's son Karl in 1859, the lectures were well attended and influential.

<sup>128</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>129</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

really an unripe intelligence; hence in its phenomena, thought unconsciously, intelligent character already peers through. Its highest goal, namely, that of becoming wholly objective for itself, nature reaches only by the highest and final reflection. This is nothing other than man or, more generally, what we call reason, by which nature returns completely into herself and by which it becomes evident that nature is originally identical with that which is recognized as the intelligent and conscious principle in us.<sup>130</sup>

Here Schelling assumes that cognition, the representation of nature or nature's becoming "objective" in the sense of becoming an object of knowledge, is not just a goal of human beings, but a goal of nature itself, which nature achieves through human beings as the highest development of its own potential for consciousness. Human consciousness emerges from nature yet differs from the rest of nature only in the degree of its consciousness and so can be the product of nature while nature in its objectivity is the product of human thought. Likewise, Schelling argues that we must be able to see human actions as resulting from natural forces but that we must also be able to suppose that nature itself is molded by free human choices, and that we can only understand this paradox by transforming the opposed poles of determinism and freedom into the unconscious and then conscious expression of thought:

We supposed the objective world to arise through a completely blind mechanism of intelligence. But how such a mechanism is possible in a nature whose basic character is consciousness would be difficult to conceive if the mechanism were not already determined beforehand by free and conscious activity. It would be just as hard to conceive how any realization at all of our aims in the external world is possible by means of conscious and free activity unless a susceptibility to such an action were already laid down in the world, even before it becomes the object of a conscious action, by virtue of the original identity of unconscious and conscious activity.<sup>131</sup>

Schelling then employs but reverses the two key ideas of Kant's third *Critique* in order to explain how nature's dual character as both conscious and unconscious is represented. First, alluding to Kant's teleology, he argues that nature, including natural beauty, "is *purposive without having been purposively produced*,"<sup>132</sup> which he claims can only be explained by his system of transcendental idealism: "according to our deductions, organic nature is itself already a producing that has become objective; hence, to that extent, it borders on free action; yet it is an unconscious intuiting of this productive process, and to that extent again itself

<sup>130</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 6; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 348.

<sup>131</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 213–14; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 358.

<sup>132</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 213–14; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 358.

a blind producing.”<sup>133</sup> However, he continues, “it is evident that art is the sole true and eternal organon as well as document of philosophy, which sets forth in ever fresh forms what philosophy cannot represent outwardly, namely, the unconscious in action and production and its original identity with the conscious”;<sup>134</sup> thus “the general organon of philosophy – and the keystone of the whole arch – is the *philosophy of art*.”<sup>135</sup> The reason for this is that it is only the product of art that “will have in common with the product of freedom the fact that it is produced with conscious intent, and with the product of nature that it is produced unconsciously”; it is in a work of art that it is most evident “that the objective element in free action arises in it by force of something independent of freedom.”<sup>136</sup> That is, at least a successful work of art is obviously the product of a freely undertaken action guided by conscious conceptions of the end to be achieved and the form and other means by which that end is to be achieved, and yet precisely what makes a work of art truly successful is something that goes beyond the antecedent conception of it, something that appears natural and necessary in contrast to artificial and arbitrary: “simultaneously with the completion of the product all appearance of freedom is removed; intelligence will feel itself surprised and *blessed* by that unification, i.e., it will regard it as though it were a freely bestowed favor of a higher nature that has by means of it made the impossible possible.”<sup>137</sup> In other words, as Schelling makes clear, it is Kant’s own conception of genius that reveals the real relation between nature and thought, mechanism and freedom: “the incomprehensible principle which adds the objective to the consciousness without the co-operation of freedom and in a certain way in opposition to freedom” – but equally as the expression of freedom – “is signified by the obscure concept of *genius*.”<sup>138</sup> Schelling agrees with Kant that true genius is manifested only in the production of art,<sup>139</sup> so it is above all else “the work of art [that] reflects for us the identity of conscious and

<sup>133</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 216; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 360.

<sup>134</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 231; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 373.

<sup>135</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 12; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 355.

<sup>136</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 219–20; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 362, 363.

<sup>137</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 221; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 364.

<sup>138</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 222; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 365.

<sup>139</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 222, 228; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 365, 370.

unconscious activity,"<sup>140</sup> which is itself the essence of reality. This is why it is art that is the "organon" and "document" of philosophy.

After this elevation of art to a level of philosophical significance never before or since conceded to it, Schelling's thought underwent a subtle shift, and with it his assessment of the metaphysical and epistemological importance of art. This second phase of Schelling's philosophy, of which the lectures on the *Philosophy of Art* are among the earliest evidence, is generally called the "identity philosophy." It is at first difficult to see what this means, since the previous stage of Schelling's work had argued for the identity of nature and thought as merely unconscious and conscious stages of intelligence. The difference is now that Schelling begins to think of both nature and thought, or as he begins to say the "real" and the "ideal," as two manifestations of an underlying commonality, without reducing the latter to one of its manifestations, namely, thought. In other words, instead of nature and thought being two superficially different but ultimately identical forms of intelligence, they are more like two different properties of an identical substance. Schelling's thought is traditionally associated with Spinoza, but it has recently been argued that his "identity philosophy" is actually more Kantian in inspiration than the previous stage of his thought. His model seems to have been the Kantian conception of judgment, on which the unquantified form "*A is B*" is replaced by the quantified form "The *x* which is *a* is also *b*" (where the connection of *b* to *x* is analytic if *b* is included in *a* and synthetic if it is not), as well as Kant's position on the mind-body problem in his "Paralogisms of Pure Reason," where he argues that what appears to us as extended, namely, body, and as unextended, namely, thought, may both be manifestations of some single underlying but unknown reality.<sup>141</sup> Whatever his inspiration, in the *Philosophy of Art* Schelling now argues that reality is always the product of the tension yet interplay between the real and the ideal, the material and the intellectual, the finite and the infinite, necessity and freedom, and that art represents this interplay through the medium of the more real or material while philosophy represents it through a more ideal or intellectual medium. As he puts it, "Since our explanation of beauty asserts that it is the mutual informing of the real and the ideal to the extent that this informing is represented in reflected imagery, this explanation also includes the following assertion: beauty is the indifference, intuited within the real, of freedom

<sup>140</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 225; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 367.

<sup>141</sup> See Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*, 175–90. Frank does not make it explicit that Kant's clearest account of judgment is to be found in his notes (e.g., Reflection 4634, Kant, Ak. 17: 616–19), with which Schelling could not have been acquainted, so that it was probably Kant's treatment of the mind-body problem in the "Paralogisms" rather than his technical analysis of judgment that was more influential in Schelling's shift to the "identity philosophy."

and necessity.”<sup>142</sup> This might make it sound as if philosophy should now yield a higher form of insight into reality than art, turning the table on the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, but that would not be correct, for Schelling’s point is precisely that since reality is always an interplay between the two sides, both forms of the representation of this interplay are equally necessary. “Art is real and objective, philosophy ideal and subjective.”<sup>143</sup>

One might be tempted to interpret this dictum to mean that philosophy represents reality through abstract concepts while philosophy presents it in particulars (which would link Schelling to the tradition of Baumgarten), but this too would be somewhat misleading. Rather, Schelling goes on to say that “philosophy does not present real things, but rather only their archetypes; the same holds true for art. The same archetypes that according to philosophy are merely reproduced imperfectly by ... real things are those that become objective in art itself – as archetypes and accordingly in their perfection.”<sup>144</sup> Unlike Plato, to whom, like Schiller, he contrasts himself, Schelling does not think that art traffics in the lowest of the low, mere simulacra of mere ordinary things that are inferior to their Forms; rather, he holds that art idealizes nature, presenting the forms of nature in a purer form than that in which we encounter them in the rest of our experience: artistic archetypes “represent the intellectual world in the reflected world.”<sup>145</sup> Yet art still manages to do this in media that are more real, more material, than the medium of philosophy: philosophy deals entirely with abstract concepts, yet art somehow manages to convey archetypes, the ideal and intellectual aspect of the world, through media such as sound, paint and stone, and speech. “Whereas philosophy intuits ... ideas as they are *in themselves*, art intuits them *objectively*. The *ideas*, to the extent that they are intuited objectively, are therefore the substance and as it were the universal and absolute material of art from which all particular works of art emerge as mature entities.”<sup>146</sup>

However, the distinction between art and philosophy is not simply congruent with that between the real and the ideal; both the real and the ideal are manifest to differing degrees in the different media of art, and even within a single medium variations in the emphasis on the real and the ideal, the more concrete and the more abstract, define different aspects and genres. This is the basis for the elaborate classification of the arts that occupies much of the lectures. Schelling divides the arts into three main groups, the arts of sound or music, the arts of sight or the plastic arts, and the arts of speech or poesy. All of these, as arts, tend

<sup>142</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 30.

<sup>143</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 13.

<sup>144</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 17.

<sup>145</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 17.

<sup>146</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 17.

toward the representation of archetypes in the medium of the real rather than the ideal, but at the same time they also occupy positions on a continuum from the real to the ideal. Thus music, since it depends on the production of sound-waves, expresses the most elementary forces of physical or “anorganic” nature; the plastic arts, since they depend on light, use a medium that is still physical but capable of illuminating an infinitude (or at least a greater number of) of ideas; and poesy uses words, the most ideal medium, but is capable of expressing even the most real forms of reality through those ideal means. Further, within each art there is also a more real element or genre, a more ideal one, and one that most fully synthesizes the real and the ideal. Thus, in music, rhythm (or beat), consisting in nothing but the succession of temporal intervals, is the most real medium for the expression of meaning; harmony, consisting in nothing but relations among cotemporaneous tones, is the most abstract; and melody expresses meaning through the “union” of rhythm and harmony.<sup>147</sup> Among the plastic arts, painting, depending heavily on the recreation of the color of real objects, employs a particularly real medium for its expression of meaning but is also limited to the most superficial representation of its objects, that is, the representation of their surfaces;<sup>148</sup> architecture expresses ideas through a more abstract and thus ideal kind of symbolism;<sup>149</sup> and sculpture most fully synthesizes the real and the ideal, expressing the most abstract ideas by the most determinate or fully realized forms.<sup>150</sup> Among the literary forms, lyric poetry is the most real and subjective, because it expresses the most particular feelings and situations;<sup>151</sup> epic is more ideal because it is “an image of history as it is in itself or within the absolute” and “portrays action in the identity of freedom and necessity ... without conflict”;<sup>152</sup> while, finally, tragedy – which ultimately stands for the dramatic whether presented on stage or through the modern medium of the novel – captures most fully the interplay of the real and the ideal, for there “both the conflict and fate are simultaneously portrayed.”<sup>153</sup> Schelling uses this scheme of the real, the ideal, and their interplay for even more fine-grained analyses of the arts – for example, in the case of painting, which is itself contrasted to architecture and sculpture within this framework, the roles of “drawing, chiaroscuro, and coloring” are analyzed in the same terms.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 110–12.

<sup>148</sup> See Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 127.

<sup>149</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 166.

<sup>150</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 182.

<sup>151</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 208.

<sup>152</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 212.

<sup>153</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 213.

<sup>154</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 140–3.

Thus far we have commented on what Schelling calls the “construction” of “art as such and in general,” that is, the concept of art, and of the “forms” of art, but not with the “content” of art. Here the gist of his position is simple: since art portrays the interplay between the real and the ideal from the side of the more real, and the real and the ideal can themselves be understood as matter and intelligence, the content of art is paradigmatically the stories of the gods – intelligence personified – and their relation to the world. Schelling was earlier quoted as stating that the content of art is “*ideas*, to the extent that they are intuited objectively”: he continues this passage by saying that “these *real* or *objective*, living and existing ideas are the gods. The universal symbolism or universal *representation* of the *ideas* as real is thus given in mythology.... Indeed the gods of any mythology are nothing other than the ideas of philosophy intuited objectively or concretely.”<sup>155</sup> This inevitably introduces a cultural and historical dimension to Schelling’s aesthetics, since mythologies have varied from place to place and time to time. But the most influential historical change in mythologies has been from the classical mythology of the Greeks to the mythology of Christianity, at the core of which, in Schelling’s view, is the transition from the representation of the “unity of the absolute and the finite” as a “product of nature,” on the one hand, and as a “product of freedom,” on the other,<sup>156</sup> that is, the transition from a panoply of gods who are personified forces of nature to a creator and his son who are personifications of free intelligence. This view is a striking transformation of Schiller’s contrast between the ancient and the modern as the naïve and the sentimental.

Schelling in fact devoted the second half of his long life to the elaboration of a philosophy of mythology, but this had little of the influence of the astonishing body of work he had produced in the first decade of his career. While Kant had argued that the existence of natural beauty gives a “hint” that the world will be amenable to the realization of our own moral ends, what thinkers influenced by the early Schelling, who did not himself develop a systematic moral philosophy, took from him above all was his conviction that because of the “original identity of unconscious and conscious activity,” a “susceptibility” to our own “conscious and free activity” must “already [be] laid down in the world.”<sup>157</sup> The conviction that nature must be suitable for our own moral development and that opening ourselves to the beauty of nature is the surest path to moral development was at the heart of the aesthetico-moral thought of such thinkers as Samuel Taylor

<sup>155</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 17.

<sup>156</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 78.

<sup>157</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 213–14; Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, 358.



Coleridge (1772–1834) in Britain and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) in the United States, each of whom had far more influence in his country than any contemporary academic philosopher.<sup>158</sup> (While by 1800 Baumgarten, Kant, and subsequent idealists had made aesthetics a regular part of the philosophy curriculum in German universities, this would not happen in British or American universities for another hundred years or more.) Coleridge spent a year in Germany in 1798–9, learning German, reading Lessing and Kant, and presumably coming to know something of Schelling, whose *Philosophy of Nature* had just been published; Coleridge subsequently came to know the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and has indeed often been accused of plagiarizing Schelling in the theoretical passages of his own *Biographia Literaria*<sup>159</sup> of 1817, in which he describes his transition from an empiricist and associationist to something very much like an absolute idealist. But while chunks of the *Biographia Literaria* do come close to having been lifted straight from Schelling, notably the statement of philosophical theses in its Chapter XII,<sup>160</sup> Coleridge's aesthetic theory is perhaps best thought of as a synthesis of Hutcheson's formal analysis of beauty, Alison's insistence that a beautiful work of art must be the expression of a dominant emotion, and Schelling's thesis that it is through beauty that we become assured of our underlying identity with nature. The first and third of these points are expressed in the "aesthetical essays" that Coleridge wrote around the time of the *Biographia Literaria*; thus in the "Principles of Genial Criticism" he writes that "the most general definition of beauty ... is ... Multëity in Unity" and that such beauty is "naturally consonant with our senses by the pre-established harmony between nature and the human mind."<sup>161</sup> Another essay from the same period, "On Poesy or Art," stresses the active role of art in "humanizing" nature:

Now Art, used collectively for painting, sculpture, architecture and music, is the mediatrix between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is therefore, the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation; color, form, motion, and sound, are the elements which it combines, and it stamps them into unity in the mould of a moral idea.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>158</sup> On Coleridge, see John H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930); René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793–1938* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1936); Engell, *Creative Imagination*, chap. 21; and Elinor Shaffer, *Coleridge's Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). On Emerson, see Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), chaps. 1–2, or Russell B. Goodman, *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>159</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, Edited with His Aesthetical Essays*, by J. Shawcross, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907).

<sup>160</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, chap. XII, 1:160–94.

<sup>161</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2:233.

<sup>162</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2:253.

The essay then continues to explain how the literary arts also perform this function. The *Biographia* adds the Alisonian point that true art expresses a predominant passion: “It has been before observed that images, however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion ... or when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet’s own spirit.”<sup>163</sup> But above all, the *Biographia Literaria* stresses Schelling’s point that art reveals that we are fully at home in nature. This is perhaps most strikingly expressed in Coleridge’s account of artistic genius – itself the central idea that Schelling had adopted and adapted from Kant – as striking the scales of adulthood from our eyes and restoring us to our original feeling of the beauty of the nature in which we are at home even though we do not always remember that. “To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child’s sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar ... this is the character and privilege of genius.” Coleridge asks, “Who has not a thousand times seen snow fall on water?” – but it takes a Burns or a Wordsworth to make us truly see this again, as adults, and thus truly to open us up to nature as our proper home.<sup>164</sup>

Ralph Waldo Emerson was never a professor of philosophy but was the voice of philosophy in mid-nineteenth-century America, with a following in Europe as well, where Thomas Carlyle considered himself his friend and Friedrich Nietzsche famously admired him. The “transcendentalism” that Emerson represented in America was certainly influenced by Schelling’s transcendental idealism, and Schelling’s themes that beauty is a pledge of the bond between nature and us and that art above all else reveals this bond runs throughout Emerson’s work. These themes are evident in the chapters devoted to aesthetic themes in all of Emerson’s essay collections, from *Nature* (1836) through *The Conduct of Life* (1860) to the extended disquisition “Poetry and Imagination” in *Letters and Social Aims* (1875). Emerson’s themes are compactly stated in the brief essay on beauty in *Nature*: “First, the simple perception of natural forms is a delight”; but second, “The presence of a higher, namely, of the spiritual element is essential to [the] perfection” of beauty, yet this “spiritual element” consists precisely in the recognition that “Nature stretcheth out her arms to embrace man, only let his thoughts be of equal greatness”; and third, “A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world,” or “a nature passed through the alembic of man,” the most direct way to express the necessary fit between nature and man.<sup>165</sup> The essay on “Art” that

<sup>163</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2:16.

<sup>164</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1:59–60.

<sup>165</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 14–19.

concludes Emerson's *Essays: First Series* (1841) and that on "The Poet" that opens *Essays: Second Series* (1844) develop these themes at greater length. Works of art reveal both "the immensity of the world" and "the opulence of human nature, which can run out to infinitude in any direction"<sup>166</sup> and thus match the immensity of the world; indeed, "The Universe is the externisation of the soul."<sup>167</sup> The artist, in turn, "through ... better perception" than other men, "stands one step nearer to things" than others do,<sup>168</sup> but the harmony between man and world that he reveals is something that all can understand, for Emerson is confident that "every man is so far a poet to be susceptible of these enchantments of nature: for all men have the thoughts whereof the universe is the celebration."<sup>169</sup> Indeed, Emerson's thought is based on the transformation of two Kantian hints into certitudes through the intermediary of absolute idealism: Kant's principle of the ideal rather than empirical intersubjective validity of judgments of taste is transformed into Emerson's certitude that "every man is so far a poet," and Kant's idea that natural beauty gives a "hint" that nature is amenable to our moral ends is transformed into Emerson's certitude that the universe is the externalization and celebration of our thoughts.

Emerson's most extended account of beauty is offered in the penultimate chapter of *The Conduct of Life*. The whole chapter is written under the aegis of Schelling's dictum that art is the "organon" and "document" of philosophy; in Emerson's words, "Beauty is the form under which the intellect prefers to study the world."<sup>170</sup> Emerson (in this regard anticipating mid-twentieth-century analytic aesthetics) has been "warned by the ill fate of many philosophers not to attempt a definition of Beauty" and "will rather enumerate a few of its qualities." In so doing, he really sums up the main traditions of aesthetic theory through Schelling. First, of course, we take a "sensuous delight" in the "forms and colors of Nature." Then we take a more intellectual pleasure in the beauty of "that which is simple; which has no superfluous parts; which exactly answers its end; which is the means of many extremes."<sup>171</sup> Next, we take pleasure in beauty as a symbol of life itself – "all beauty must be organic," and "Nothing interests us which is stark or bounded, but only what streams with life, what is in act or endeavor to reach somewhat beyond."<sup>172</sup> Beyond that, "Veracity first of all, and forever."<sup>173</sup> But, not instead of but on top of all these forms of beauty, there is beauty as understood

<sup>166</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 433.

<sup>167</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 453.

<sup>168</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 456.

<sup>169</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 453.

<sup>170</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 1102.

<sup>171</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 1103.

<sup>172</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 1104.

<sup>173</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 1106.

by Schelling, the expression of the identity between man and nature: “The new virtue which constitutes a thing beautiful, is a certain cosmical quality, or, a power to suggest relation to the whole world, and so lift the object out of a pitiful individuality. Every natural feature ... has in it somewhat which is not private, but universal, speaks of that central benefit which is the soul of Nature, and thereby is beautiful.”<sup>174</sup>

Schelling transformed Kant’s thought that beauty gives us a “hint” that nature is amenable to our ends and can be taken as a symbol of the supersensible substratum that underlies both nature and man into the certitude that natural but even more so artistic beauty lays bare the metaphysical identity of nature and man. More popular writers like Coleridge and Emerson moralized Schelling’s metaphysics, making beauty’s revelation of our identity with nature the foundation of a “new virtue,” rather than remaining content with Kant’s more modest claim that a disposition to natural beauty may be “serviceable” to a morality whose fundamental principle has nothing to do with feelings of beauty or any other feelings. The risks of assigning such direct metaphysical and moral significance to the aesthetic become evident in Hegel, who accepts that the aesthetic can play such a role but also argues that the ends of both metaphysics and morality are ultimately better achieved by philosophy itself, thereby leading to the “death of art.”

## HEGEL

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) and Schelling were intimates at the Tübingen theological school and at the height of Schelling’s fame coedited a journal (*Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* 1802–3) that was supposed to be the vehicle for their common philosophical position. Yet by the time Hegel presented his systematic theory of the fine arts, briefly adumbrated in his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* of 1817 and then developed at length in the lectures on fine arts that he gave five times (in Heidelberg in 1818 and then in Berlin in 1820–1, 1823, 1826, and 1828–9) and that were then posthumously published,<sup>175</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, 1110–11.

<sup>175</sup> The published lectures were compiled from Hegel’s own notes and student transcriptions by H. G. Hotho and published in 1835, with a revised edition in 1842. There have been two postwar editions, one originating in East Germany, G. W. F. Hegel, *Ästhetik*, ed. Friedrich Bassenge (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, n.d.), and the other as vols. 13–15 of Hegel, *Werke: Theorieausgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michael, 20 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970–). There have been two complete translations of the lectures into English, the first, Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F. P. B. Osmaston, 4 vols (London: G. Bell, 1916–20); the second Hegel, *Aesthetics: The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); the introduction was also translated by the British neo-Hegelian Bernard Bosanquet in

a fundamental difference between Schelling's and Hegel's conceptions of the significance of art had emerged: while for Schelling art was first superior to philosophy and then coequal to it, for Hegel art was only the first of three modes of "absolute knowledge," a necessary phase in the development of human knowledge of reality but one destined to be superseded first by religion and then by philosophy, a fate summed up in Hegel's notorious statement that "art is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past"<sup>176</sup> – his famous "death of art" thesis. Schelling and Hegel share an essentially cognitivist conception of art, that is, a conception of art as functioning primarily to convey knowledge, as opposed to employing the cognitive faculties in a playful way, as in Kant, or expressing emotion rather than conveying knowledge, as in Alison. For Hegel, as for Schelling, art "represents even the highest ideas *in sensuous forms*, thereby bringing them nearer to the character of natural phenomena, to the senses, and to feeling."<sup>177</sup> Even so, "art is not, either in content or in form, the supreme and absolute mode of bringing the mind's genuine interests into consciousness."<sup>178</sup> So if the difference between Schelling and Hegel is not founded on a disagreement about art's function as a sensuous medium for the conveyance of truth, it must instead concern a disagreement about the nature of truth and thus about the nature of reality itself.

This is hardly the place for an extensive exploration of the difference between Schelling's and Hegel's metaphysics, so a brief statement will have to suffice. As we saw, Schelling's mature philosophy of art was based on his so-called identity philosophy, which treated the real and ideal, the physical and the mental or spiritual, as equally important and also interacting aspects of some single reality, which could therefore be given adequate expression only by the use of both art, as a predominantly sensuous medium, and philosophy, as intellectual. Hegel's mature philosophy accepts the existence of matter but treats the object of knowledge as reason itself, first as it expresses itself by transforming matter, and then as it comes

1886 and recently republished as Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Inwood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993). Where possible, the latter will be cited here. Hotho's text was heavily edited, and several transcriptions of Hegel's original lecture courses have recently been published to remedy their defects; these include *Vorlesung über Ästhetik* (Berlin, 1820–1), ed. H. Schneider (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1995) and *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst* (1823), ed. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1997). But as it is Hotho's version that has formed the image of Hegel's aesthetics for more than 150 years, that will be the basis for the treatment of Hegel here. For treatments of Hegel's aesthetics, see Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus*, chap. 4; William Maker, ed., *Hegel and Aesthetics* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2000); Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, chap. 3; and Benjamin Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>176</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 13.

<sup>177</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 9.

<sup>178</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 11.

to be self-conscious or “for itself.”<sup>179</sup> Hegel divides his philosophy into two main parts, “logic” and “real philosophy,” the first of which studies the categories of thought and the second of which chronicles the transformation of matter by thought and then the emergence of thought “for itself,” or its own recognition of its intellectual and rational nature. “Real philosophy” is in turn divided into two parts, the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit, the first of which describes the transformation of matter by thought up to a point that still does not involve consciousness of thought, and the second of which describes the development of the consciousness of thought itself. The philosophy of spirit in turn comprises three parts: “subjective spirit,” or the emergence of consciousness in individual psychology; “objective spirit,” or the development of social institutions such as the family, civil society (social and economic groupings larger than the family), and the state, all of which clearly involve conscious human intentions but not consciousness of those intentions as expressions of spirit or reason as such; and finally, “absolute knowing,” in which reason at last comes to understand itself as the formative power that has been at work throughout the development of both nature and human behavior and institutions. This self-understanding of reason emerges through art, religion, and finally philosophy itself, and just as reason began its work by transforming matter, so the self-understanding of reason is first expressed in a sensuous medium, namely, art, but just as the ultimate destiny of reason is to understand that all meaning and form come from itself, not from matter, so the ultimate form of its self-understanding must be purely intellectual, and art must be left behind rather than remaining, as it is for Schelling, an equal partner in our understanding of reality.

In his lectures, for all their length, Hegel expresses the essential elements of his view early and quickly. In his first paragraphs, he states that although “in common life” we speak of the beauty of colors and shapes, flowers and animals, “artistic beauty stands *higher* than nature,” because “the beauty of art is the beauty that is born – born again, that is – of the mind.”<sup>180</sup> By this he conveys that while all form, and thus all beauty, is the product of reason, the beauty of art is the first medium in which reason comes to know itself as the source of form, or to be “born again” as conscious mind. “Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in this higher element and as created thereby.”<sup>181</sup>

<sup>179</sup> For the outlines of an interpretation of Hegel stressing his view that reason both is the essence of reality and must come to recognize itself as such, see the entry on Hegel by Rolf-Peter Horstmann in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 4:259–80, esp. 264–5, or the expansion of this article in Dina Emundts and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *G. W. F. Hegel: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2002).

<sup>180</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 3–4.

<sup>181</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 4.

What spirit understands as it becomes conscious of itself as mind is also that it is *free*, that is, self-determining, expressing its own nature rather than the nature of anything else, such as matter (a conception of freedom that we saw at work in Schiller's "Kallias" letters); by equating art as a medium for consciousness of the mental and rational nature of reality with art as a medium for the expression of freedom Hegel can thus align his own view with Kant's transformation of the eighteenth-century conception of beauty as disinterested. This places art in the sphere of "absolute knowing": "Fine art is not real art till it is in this sense free, and only achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the divine, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit."<sup>182</sup> But this is what also leads to the limitation of the significance of art: for the mind "generates out of itself the works of fine art as the first middle term of reconciliation between pure thought and what is external, sensuous, and transitory, between nature with its finite actuality and the infinite freedom of the reason that it comprehends"<sup>183</sup> – but only the *first* reconciliation, because art remains too closely connected to the sensuous and therefore incapable of fully representing the nature of mind itself:

But if, on the other side, we assign this high position to art, we must no less bear in mind, on the other hand, that art is not, either in content or in form, the supreme and absolute mode of bringing to consciousness the true interests of spirit. The form of art is enough to limit it to a restricted content. Only a certain sphere and stage of truth is capable of being represented in art.<sup>184</sup>

In particular, art is capable of representing the intellectual and spiritual element in its human form – this is the glory of art – but is not fully capable of representing intellect and spirit as such as the essence of reality – this is the task on which religion makes a start but that only philosophy can complete.

This conception of both the task and the limits of art is the basis for Hegel's classification of the arts and his periodization of the history of art. Hegel compares the main forms of art – architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry broadly conceived – in terms of their potential for expressing the nature of spirit and divides the main periods in the history of art on the basis of what level of expression of spirit had been attained and thus what medium of art is most characteristic of that period. Architecture is capable of only the most arbitrary or

<sup>182</sup> Here I have followed Knox somewhat more closely than Bosanquet; see Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1:7, as well as *Introductory Lectures*, 9.

<sup>183</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 10.

<sup>184</sup> Here again I have drawn on Knox's translation as well as Bosanquet's: see Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1:9, and *Introductory Lectures*, 11.

“symbolic” representation of intellectual ideas and is therefore the paradigmatic form of art at a time when the understanding of spirit itself is most vague, particularly when there is no real understanding that human beings themselves are the earthly vehicle of spirit as such. Hegel thus sees architecture as the paradigmatic art of such early cultures as the Egyptian, in which architectural forms such as the pyramid are imbued with symbolic but indeterminate meaning, and in which gods are represented by melanges of human and animal parts, such as sphinxes.<sup>185</sup> He sees sculpture as capable of representing brilliantly the human form, thus of representing the exterior aspects of human nature, and so as well suited for expressing an identification of spirit with humanity,<sup>186</sup> but in a way that falls short of a recognition of spirit as such, which must ultimately transcend the particularity of human form. Sculpture is thus the “classical” art form par excellence, although of course in the classical period architecture was used in an essentially nonsymbolic way to house the sculptural representations of divinity, the converse of the way in which sculpture was used in ancient Egypt to supplement the symbolism of the architecture. Finally, painting, music, and poetry can begin to represent the immaterial nature of spirit or thought as such, because these media increasingly deemphasize the materiality of the physical world.<sup>187</sup> Painting makes a start on this by using only two dimensions to represent the three-dimensional;<sup>188</sup> music omits all use of spatiality and employs only temporal relationships to achieve its effects;<sup>189</sup> and, finally, poetry – that is, creative literature in general – breaks away from materiality altogether and represents its content by pure signs.<sup>190</sup> These are thus the predominant media of the modern, Christian, or “Romantic” era, in which mankind begins to realize that the nature of spirit transcends its embodiment in the physical form of human beings – again, the influence of Schiller’s distinction between the naïve and the sentimental can be detected. But these media are still limited: they convey human interiority rather than externality, that is, the way the world looks, sounds, and feels to human beings rather than the way human beings look in the world (like sculpture),<sup>191</sup> but they still cannot represent

<sup>185</sup> See Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 82–4, and *Aesthetics*, 2:634–7.

<sup>186</sup> See Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 84–5, and *Aesthetics*, 2:726–7.

<sup>187</sup> See Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 85–7.

<sup>188</sup> See Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:805.

<sup>189</sup> See Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 94–5.

<sup>190</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 95.

<sup>191</sup> This is actually a simplification of Hegel’s view of painting, where he interestingly ranks portraiture in oils extremely highly because the layering and translucency possible in oils allow a suggestion of the inner life of a human being to shine through the representation of its skin. For a good discussion of Hegel’s view, see Stephen Houlgate, “Hegel and the Art of Painting,” in *Hegel and Aesthetics*, ed. William Maker (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2000), 61–82. Houlgate also documents Hegel’s extensive acquaintance with paintings in many of the most important collections and museums in trans-Alpine Europe accessible in his lifetime.



thought as such.<sup>192</sup> This only religion and philosophy do, although even religion still represents thought and its incarnation in anthropomorphic imagery and thus must itself be superseded by philosophy. In fact, the difference between art and religion is subtle – both essentially trade in anthropomorphic representations of thought, although the material element of such representations is essential to art while only incidental to religion – and philosophy really supersedes the conjunction of the two.

Hegel's assumption that art necessarily aims to represent the intellectual essence of reality together with his analysis of the representational limits of the various media available to art thus ground his inference that in the "reflective culture of our life today" art must lose "for us the genuine truth and life" it once had.<sup>193</sup> This thesis does not, of course, mean that as of 1831, or 2011, or any specific date, there can no longer be any production or innovation in the traditional media of art, or perhaps even any invention of new media for art, for Hegel did not derive it from any particular criticism of the art of his own time, but it does mean that (in Hegel's view) no medium of art, not even a new one as long as it remains bound to some material element, can offer significant new insight into the nature of reality. Even that thesis, of course, has seemed offensive to many, and various strategies have been suggested to get around it. One commentator suggests that since different cultures develop at different rates, art may retain more significance in one culture than in another,<sup>194</sup> but it is not clear that this sits well with Hegel's view that there is an inevitable progression of cultures themselves and will in any case be of little consolation to art lovers in a philosophically advanced culture. Another strategy would be that advanced in recent years by Arthur Danto, namely, to argue that art is after all a genuine medium of philosophical exploration,<sup>195</sup> but the success of that strategy will depend on a conception of the aims and results of philosophy itself that is quite different from Hegel's. Given Hegel's own assumptions, the "death of art" thesis seems unavoidable.

Hegel shares Schelling's assumption that the aim of art is metaphysical insight, but his conclusion that art can offer only a sensuous intimation of the self-consciousness of reason and that it must therefore be superseded by philosophy may be taken as a tacit return to Kant's own insistence that both aesthetic experience and fine art can offer at most a symbolic representation of human freedom and its noumenal basis. In considering the connection between aesthetics and morality,

<sup>192</sup> See Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:793.

<sup>193</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 12–13.

<sup>194</sup> See Robert Wicks, "Hegel's Aesthetics: An Overview," in Frederick C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 348–77, at 369–70.

<sup>195</sup> See Arthur Coleman Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

Hegel begins with what seems to be an explicit reversion to the standpoint of Kant. His discussion of the “aim of art” is devoted primarily to the issue of the moral significance of art. He begins by conceding – on the side, as it were, of Aristotle rather than Plato – that art can assist in the mitigation of violent passions precisely because through art “man is released from his immediate sunkness in a feeling, and becomes conscious of it as of something external to him, towards which he must now enter into an *ideal* relation.”<sup>196</sup> But he then rejects the view that art should be used to provide “a *determinate* kind and an essential end” of moral education, arguing that if “moral instruction” is treated as the end of art, then “the universal nature of the represented content is doomed to be exhibited and expounded directly and obviously, as abstract proposition ... not merely in an indirect way in the concrete form of a work of art” and that in such a case “the sensuous plastic form, which is just what makes the work of art a work of art, becomes a mere otiose accessory.”<sup>197</sup> This seems reminiscent of Kant’s thesis that a judgment of taste cannot be grounded on any determinate concept of the good. However, at this point Hegel’s argument takes a turn in another direction, for what he next argues is that the real problem with the conception of art as a vehicle for moral instruction lies not in art as much as in the underlying conception of morality itself as consisting of universal laws and abstract *oughts* that are entirely opposed to all particularity, as requiring “the opposition of the abstract law against the abundance of individual phenomena ... the battle of the spirit against the flesh, of duty for duty’s sake ... the hard conflict of inward freedom and of natural necessity.”<sup>198</sup> If that were what morality itself required, then an art that also trafficked in general laws and abstract concepts could serve its purpose, but in fact morality itself requires that such oppositions be overcome, and in fact the role of art is to assist philosophy in overcoming such oppositions by providing sensuous demonstration of the truth that they *can* be overcome. “If the culture of the world has fallen into such a contradiction, it becomes the task of philosophy to undo or cancel it, i.e., to show that neither the one alternative in its abstraction nor the other in similar one-sidedness possesses truth, but that they are essentially self-dissolving; that truth lies only in the conciliation and mediation of the two”; and “art has the vocation of revealing *the truth*” of the necessity and possibility of this reconciliation “in the form of sensuous artistic shape.”<sup>199</sup> Unlike Kant, Hegel does not claim merely that art can give a hint of the possibility of the realization of the ends of morality; more like Schiller, he seems to hold that art’s sensuous representation of the possibility of the reconciliation between universal and

<sup>196</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 54.

<sup>197</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 55–6.

<sup>198</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 59.

<sup>199</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 60–1.

particular that morality requires is indispensable to the realization of morality. But then, unlike both Schiller and Schelling, he is also committed to the view that art's sensuous representation of this possibility must be superseded by philosophy's own insight into this possibility: "it was not till philosophy discovered how to overcome this antithesis absolutely that it grasped its own conception and, just in as far as it did so, the conception of nature and of art,"<sup>200</sup> but once philosophy did discover this, then it would also have discovered how it must go beyond art.

### SCHOPENHAUER

A very different use of the Kantian inheritance was made by the philosopher who was Hegel's most vehement opponent and ultimately most famous contemporary, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860).<sup>201</sup> While other heirs of Kant beginning with Schiller had transformed Kant's conception of beauty as the symbol of the morally good into a doctrine of aesthetic education in the principles of morality, Schopenhauer made Kant's conception of the disinterestedness of aesthetic response into the keystone of his own aesthetic theory. His emphasis on this strand of Kant's theory was consistent with his very un-Kantian moral philosophy, which denied that reason could regulate the will by means of strict adherence to principle and argued instead that one could achieve salvation for oneself and compassion for others only by means of the kind of detachment from all concerns of the will, a detachment experienced above all in the aesthetic state of mind.

Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory and its connection to his moral philosophy cannot be understood without reference to his metaphysics. Like Kant, Schopenhauer held that the objects of ordinary experience are mere appearances, created by an interaction between an underlying reality or in-itself and our own cognitive capacities. Like many of the successors to Kant beginning with Reinhold, Schopenhauer attempted to reduce the plurality of our cognitive capacities to a single principle, in his case a principle of sufficient reason that manifests itself in the forms of space, time, causality, motives, and actions.<sup>202</sup> But a

<sup>200</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, 61.

<sup>201</sup> Schopenhauer's aesthetics has been well treated in secondary literature. For general treatments of Schopenhauer's philosophy that include useful discussions of his aesthetics, see Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963); Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Julian Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987); and Christopher Janaway, *Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). A volume devoted to Schopenhauer's aesthetics is Dale Jacquette, ed., *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, chap. 4.

<sup>202</sup> Schopenhauer's reinterpretation of the Kantian doctrine of the forms of intuition and understanding was provided in his first work, his 1825 doctoral dissertation *The Fourfold Root of the*

much greater difference with Kant lay in Schopenhauer's view that we can have insight into the underlying nature of reality, beyond the realm of appearances, by means of our own experience of willing.<sup>203</sup> Further, for Schopenhauer, the will is not identical to practical reason or even amenable to its influence but is an arational source of incessant striving to attain goals that are never satisfying or stable. Nature outside us can only be understood as a realm of incessant strife among forces and life-forms blindly seeking to dominate one another<sup>204</sup> (Schopenhauer may have contributed as much as Darwin to the nineteenth-century conception of "nature red in tooth and claw"), and our own nature likewise expresses our will's incessant pursuit of goals that are either frustrating because unattainable or unsatisfying when attained.<sup>205</sup> Only detachment from the concerns of the will offers any prospect, not of positive happiness, but at least of release from pain, and only recognition of the insignificance of the apparent boundaries between our own selves and those of other people can leave any room for the transformation of egoism into compassion, which is, in Schopenhauer's view, the only possible basis for ethics.<sup>206</sup>

Schopenhauer's conception of beauty is expounded in the Third Book of *The World as Will and Representation*. On his account, in the experience of a beautiful object "we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things" – all relevant only to the practical concerns of the will – "but simply and solely the *what*.... We lose ourselves entirely in the object ... we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object"; we become "*pure will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge*."<sup>207</sup> In aesthetic experience, in other words, the individual is transformed from an ordinary subject, individuated by its particular concerns and desires and by its relations to the particular objects around it, into an unindividuated, desire-free subjectivity. At the same time, the objects of this experience are transformed from ordinary appearances, as fully individuated as ordinary selves, into what Schopenhauer,

*Principle of Sufficient Reason* (in Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Arthur Hübscher, 4th ed. [Mannheim: Brockhaus, 1988]).

<sup>203</sup> This is the central argument of Schopenhauer's magnum opus, *The World as Will and Representation*, dated 1819 although actually published in 1818. Citations here will be to the translation by E. F. J. Payne (Indian Hills, Colo.: Falcon's Wing Press, 1958).

<sup>204</sup> Schopenhauer began his university studies in biology and medicine, and biological imagery loomed large in his work; he published a separate volume on *The Will in Nature* in 1836 (also in his *Sämtliche Werke*).

<sup>205</sup> This is the argument of the Second Book of *The World as Will and Representation*; see 1:93–165, especially the summary at §29, 162–5.

<sup>206</sup> This is the argument of the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation* (1:271–412), and the separate work of 1841, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

<sup>207</sup> Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, §34, 1:178–9.

here explicitly following Plato (and probably influenced by Schelling) rather than Kant, calls “Ideas,” which are the universal forms of appearances or of the “objectifications of the will.” Just as the will is objectified at different levels or grades ranging from the most elemental forms of nature to the actions of nature’s most complex products, human beings, so there is a series of Ideas or forms of objectifications of the will, ranging from the forms of elemental forces such as gravity to the forms of human action, and Schopenhauer devotes a considerable portion of his discussion to analyzing the several forms of art ranging from architecture to poetry as expressions of the Ideas ranging from those of gravity to those of human action.<sup>208</sup> Schopenhauer always stresses that the experience of beauty involves two elements, “a purely knowing subject and a known Idea as object.”<sup>209</sup> Initially, he speaks of these two elements merely as “correlative,”<sup>210</sup> and he may seem to leave it unclear whether it is the will-less state of mind that allows us access to the Ideas or the unindividuated and timeless character of the Ideas that releases us from our ordinary obsessions and thus allows us to enter the will-less state of mind. In fact, his view is that each of these connections obtains under appropriate circumstances: “the source of aesthetic enjoyment will lie sometimes rather in the apprehension of the known Idea, sometimes rather in the bliss and peace of mind of pure knowledge free from all willing, and thus from all individuality and the pain that results therefrom.” In fact, he continues, “this predominance of one or the other constituent element of aesthetic enjoyment will depend on whether the intuitively grasped Ideas is a higher or lower grade of the will’s objectivity,”<sup>211</sup> and this leads to Schopenhauer’s account of the difference between natural and artistic beauty. Sometimes the “purely objective frame of mind is facilitated and favoured from without by accommodating objects, by the abundance of natural beauty that invites contemplation, and even presses itself upon us,” thereby “snatching us, although only for a few moments, from subjectivity, from the thralldom of the will”;<sup>212</sup> in such cases, Ideas press themselves upon us and release us from the will, but only the simpler Ideas of natural forces and forms are likely to do this. More complex Ideas, however, do not press themselves upon us but rather require a rare and heightened cognitive capacity that “plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world’s course, and holds it isolated before it,” the “*gift of genius*,” which “consists precisely in the preeminent ability for such contemplation” and “is nothing but the most complete *objectivity*.”<sup>213</sup> In the case of genius, which is manifested in the production of

<sup>208</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §§42–51, 1:213–55.

<sup>209</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §42, 1:212.

<sup>210</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §34, 1:179.

<sup>211</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §34, 1:212.

<sup>212</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §38, 1:197.

<sup>213</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §36, 1:185.

art, the objective attitude thus seems to precede the perception of the Ideas rather than vice versa. However, although genius is a power of perception that is granted only to a few, the true genius also has the power to communicate “to others the Idea he has grasped,” and, conversely, more ordinary people have the power to perceive the Ideas that the genius has isolated for them, “as otherwise they would be just as incapable of enjoying works of art as of producing them,”<sup>214</sup> and to be put into the will-less and painless state of mind characteristic of the experience of beauty by their perception of these Ideas. Thus, in the experience of natural beauty, of which everyone is capable, the perception of the Ideas precedes and produces the will-less and painless state of mind; in the production of art, of which only a few are capable, a purely objective state of mind, already detached from the individual concerns of ordinary life,<sup>215</sup> is a prerequisite for the perception and communication of Ideas, but in the reception of art by its ordinary audience, it is once again the perception of Ideas, though in this case Ideas perceived and communicated by the artistic genius rather than pressed upon us by nature, that precedes and induces the painless and will-less state of mind.

This account allows Schopenhauer to avoid an objection that is often pressed upon the “aesthetic attitude” theory, of which he is considered the progenitor.<sup>216</sup> According to this theory, the experience of beauty or other aesthetic properties depends upon the ability, as Schopenhauer himself puts it, to “relinquish the ordinary way of considering things,” which blocks us from the appreciation of beauty because of our practical concerns,<sup>217</sup> and thereby open ourselves to the beauty that lies in things. But on such an account, it seems that anything could at any time be perceived as beautiful, contradicting our ordinary assumption that not just the experience of beauty but beauty itself is a rare thing. For Schopenhauer, however, while some elemental Ideas may press themselves upon any and all of us in the experience of nature, the ability to adopt the objective attitude necessary to grasp more complex Ideas is a rare gift, and the experience of such Ideas is communicated to the vast majority of us who lack that gift only by works of artistic genius. In other words, the aesthetic attitude is by no means something that any of us can easily adopt at any time; the ability to adopt this attitude, at least with respect to the higher Ideas, is rare, and consequently the objects – works of artistic genius – that can communicate such Ideas are also rare.

<sup>214</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §37, 1:194–5.

<sup>215</sup> See Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §36, 1:184–94.

<sup>216</sup> The “aesthetic attitude” theory can be traced back to the famous article by Edward Bullough, “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle,” *British Journal of Psychology* 5 (1912): 87–118, reprinted in his *Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays*, ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957); the classical presentation of the theory is Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960).

<sup>217</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §34, 1:178.

In addition to adapting Kant's theory of genius to his own purposes, Schopenhauer reinterprets the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime within his own framework: where Ideas "readily speak to us" and move "us from knowledge of mere relations serving the will into aesthetic contemplation," there we have the experience of beauty, but where "those very objects, whose significant forms invite us to a pure contemplation of them, may have a hostile relation to the human will in general, as manifested in its objectivity, the human body," and where the beholder must "consciously turn away from" the danger to his body in order to "contemplate, as pure, will-less subject of knowing, those very objects so terrible to his will," there we have the "feeling of the *sublime*."<sup>218</sup> Here, too, we may have an answer to the standard objection against the aesthetic attitude theory: while it may indeed be true that beauty can readily be perceived almost anywhere, at least in nature, beauty is not the only aesthetic quality; the sublime is equally fundamental, but the experience of the sublime is by no means as readily accessible as the experience of beauty and requires a special force of mind analogous if not identical to the power of artistic genius.

As noted earlier, Schopenhauer's classification of the arts is based on the premise that each form of art deals with a characteristic form of appearance, or, in his terms, an Idea as a form of the objectification of the will. Thus, architecture brings "to clearer perceptiveness some of those Ideas that are the lowest grades of the will's objectivity," such as "gravity, cohesion, rigidity, hardness";<sup>219</sup> horticulture finds Ideas in the "higher grade of vegetable nature";<sup>220</sup> animal painting and sculpture reveal yet higher Ideas of living form in nature; historical painting and sculpture present in outwardly perceptible form "the will's most complete objectification at the highest grade at which this is possible, namely the Idea of man in general, completely and fully expressed in the perceived form";<sup>221</sup> and poetry, culminating in tragedy, reveals the "Idea which is the highest grade of the will's objectivity" altogether, "namely the presentation of man in the connected series of his efforts and actions."<sup>222</sup> In all of these arts, although the subject-matter is the realm of appearance rather than of the in-itself, the Ideas represented present appearance in its universality rather than particularity and thus allow release from the obsessions of our particular wills; in all of these arts, "pure knowing comes to us, so to speak, in order to deliver us from willing and its stress."<sup>223</sup>

<sup>218</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §39, 1:201.

<sup>219</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §43, 1:214.

<sup>220</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §44, 1:218.

<sup>221</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §45, 1:221.

<sup>222</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §51, 1:244.

<sup>223</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §51, 1:250.

The one art form that does not seem to fit into this scheme, because it is not obviously representational, is music: “In it we do not recognize the copy, the repetition, of any Idea of the inner nature of the world.”<sup>224</sup> To deal with this problem, Schopenhauer famously proposes that while music is not a copy of any of the forms of the appearance of reality, that is, of the will, it is nothing less than “a *copy of the will itself*,” “as *immediate* an objectification and copy of the whole *will* as the world itself is,” and that “for this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence.”<sup>225</sup> More specifically, in the range of elements from harmony to melody that music comprises, “the whole gradation of the Ideas in which the will objectifies itself” is represented,<sup>226</sup> but as it were from the side of the will itself rather than from the side of its appearances.

Leaving aside any doubts about Schopenhauer’s fundamental identification of the will as the essence of reality, there might still seem to be a paradox here, namely, that although what we enjoy in the experience of the arts is the release from the will, what Schopenhauer identifies as the highest form of art, music, represents nothing other than the will itself. Should that not lead to a maximally painful rather than painless state of mind? There are two reasons why this result does not follow from Schopenhauer’s assumptions. First, although this is not always clear, he has assumed throughout his exposition that we take not one but two kinds of pleasure in aesthetic experience, not just the as it were negative pleasure of release from the painful demands of our individual wills, but also a positive pleasure in cognition itself – as already noted, “the source of aesthetic enjoyment will lie sometimes rather in the apprehension of the known Idea, sometimes rather in the bliss and peace of mind of pure knowledge free from all willing.”<sup>227</sup> Music, too, offers cognition, even though of the nature of the will itself rather than of its outward appearances, and thus is pleasurable rather than painful. Second, in all its forms art effects our release from the bonds of our individual wills by presenting us with universals rather than particulars, and music, too, even though it presents us with intimations of the will itself, presents the will as universal rather than as our own particular wills and thus allows us release from the latter: “music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind *themselves* ... in the abstract, their essential nature ... and so also without the motives for them.”<sup>228</sup>

<sup>224</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §52, 1:256.

<sup>225</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §52, 1:257.

<sup>226</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §52, 1:258.

<sup>227</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §42, 1:212.

<sup>228</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §52, 1:261.



The experience of both beauty and sublimity in both nature and all forms of art thus offers us release from the painful clamor of our individual wills and in so doing directly facilitates the attainment of one of the fundamental goals of Schopenhauerian ethics, namely, salvation from one's own pains – which at the same time, by diminishing one's concern with one's own individuality, also opens the way to the other component of morality as Schopenhauer sees it, namely, compassion with the suffering of others. Beyond this Schopenhauer is not particularly clear about the relation between aesthetic experience and morality: Is the will-less and painless state of pure subjectivity achieved in aesthetic experience just a foretaste of the ethical condition, which at best assures of the possibility of attaining that condition? Is it one way of entering that condition, but not the only way? Or is aesthetic experience the unique and indispensable path to morality itself? While Schopenhauer does not present a direct answer to this problem, reflection upon a potential paradox in his ethical theory itself might suggest one. For Schopenhauer, the aim of ethics is release from the incessant demands of one's particular will for the sake of one's own salvation from pain and compassion with the pains of others. But if such transcendence of one's particular will can only be achieved through a concentrated and rigorous exercise of one's own will, as a Kantian would suppose, then it would seem that there can be no escape from the demands of the individual will after all. Schopenhauer might avoid such a paradox by appealing to the will-less character of aesthetic experience: in the experience of natural beauty, universal Ideas with their liberating power press themselves upon us without any effort of our own wills; in artistic production, it is the exceptional cognitive power of the genius rather than any unusual strength of his will that allows him to discover and communicate Ideas; and in the reception of art by the rest of us, it is the work of the genius rather than any great effort of our own that opens up to us to the Ideas that liberate us from the demands of our own wills. So if Schopenhauer were willing to assert that aesthetic experience is indispensable to the achievement of the moral state of mind, he would have a way of avoiding the paradox that otherwise threatens his moral theory itself.

#### MILL AND RUSKIN

We can conclude this survey with some comments on the aesthetic thought of the two most influential thinkers of mid-nineteenth-century Britain, John Stuart Mill (1806–73) and John Ruskin (1819–1900). Neither of these thinkers was a professional aesthetician in the contemporary sense or even a professor of philosophy like many of the figures previously discussed – Mill was a bureaucrat, epistemologist, political philosopher, economist, and sometime politician, and Ruskin was an independently wealthy art critic, lecturer, and journalist – but both had an

influence on subsequent aesthetics far greater than that of any of their academic contemporaries.

Mill's contribution to aesthetics was twofold. First, in his single essay devoted explicitly to aesthetic topics, his 1833 "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties," he transmitted a form of Alison's theory that the essence of art is the communication of emotion to later generations, where it would be celebrated (as by Leo Tolstoy) or criticized (as by R. G. Collingwood). Second, in both occasional pieces and more influentially his immortal *On Liberty* (1863), Mill would sustain the fascination with the concept of genius characteristic of so many of his predecessors, but with a major twist: while thinkers from Kant to Schopenhauer saw genius as a rare gift to individuals that nevertheless allows them to communicate universally valid ideas and images, for Mill genius is the source of the ineluctable diversity of thoughts and tastes that he celebrates as one of the glories of the human condition.

By contrast to many of the figures thus far discussed, for whom "poetry" (or "poesy" or *Dichtung*) is a generic term for creative literature, Mill's "Thoughts on Poetry" is structured around a contrast between poetry and fiction – although this is not a contrast between genres, such as lyric poetry and the novel, since "both elements, poetry and narrative or incident," may be realized in works in either genre or even combined in the same work. Rather, it is a contrast between aims and objects: "The truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly; the truth of fiction is to give a true picture of life."<sup>229</sup> Fiction represents human life from the outside, through the depictions of actions; poetry represents human life from the inside, through "the delineation of states of feeling,"<sup>230</sup> or "of the deeper and more secret workings of human emotion."<sup>231</sup> Moreover, once this distinction has been made, it can be seen that the distinction between poetry and fiction, or between the inward and the outward, "intersect[s] the whole domain of art"; thus Mill argues that there is a difference between poetry and "oratory" in music, which is a distinction between the "garrulous" passion of the oratorical and the passion of "the mind ... looking within," the expression of passion without apparent concern for its effect on others that Mill likens to soliloquy.<sup>232</sup> He also puts this point by suggesting that in the truly poetical, "the feeling declares itself by such signs as escape from us when we are unconscious of being seen."<sup>233</sup> "In the

<sup>229</sup> John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties," in *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 346.

<sup>230</sup> Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 347.

<sup>231</sup> Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 345.

<sup>232</sup> Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 350.

<sup>233</sup> Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 352.

arts which speak to the eye, the same distinctions will be found to hold";<sup>234</sup> thus, paintings typified by "eloquence" "express the feelings of one person as modified by the presence of others," whereas in more strictly poetical painting "The unity, and wholeness, and aesthetic congruity of the picture ... lies in singleness of expression" achieved by "such imagery as would spontaneously arise in a highly imaginative mind, when contemplating those objects under the impression of the feelings which they are intended to inspire"<sup>235</sup> but without evident concern for the effect of those feelings on others. And although Mill's distinction is not initially presented in the form of a value-judgment or ranking, in the end it seems clear that it is meant to suggest that the most valuable form of art is the truly poetical, that which expresses genuine feeling most directly: "The difference, then, between the poetry of a poet, and the poetry of a cultivated but not naturally poetic mind, is, that in the latter, with however bright a halo of feeling the thought may be surrounded and glorified, the thought itself is always the conspicuous object; while the poetry of a poet is feeling itself, employing thought only as the medium of its expression."<sup>236</sup> It is his ultimate assumption that the highest value of art lies in its immediate expression of emotion that places Mill squarely in the tradition of Alison; it is that same commitment that will open his position to many criticisms in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>237</sup>

In an 1832 article on genius, Mill makes two conventional points: that genius is exemplified in the extraction of "general truth" from "our own consciousness," or by "*originality*," and that "The property which distinguishes every work of genius in poetry and art from incoherency and vain caprice is, that it is *one*, *harmonious*, and a *whole*: that its parts are connected together as standing in a common relation to some leading and central idea or purpose."<sup>238</sup> No rejection of the traditional view that genius is a rare power of individuals to create works with universal validity is suggested here. But thirty years later, in *On Liberty*, although this is hardly a work devoted to aesthetics, Mill praises genius as the source of the kind of variety rather than uniformity in human thought and action that should be encouraged rather than limited in a liberal society. His praise is by no means limited to artistic genius – indeed, he may seem to slight artistic genius when he says that "people think genius a fine thing if it enables a man to write an exciting

<sup>234</sup> Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 351.

<sup>235</sup> Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 353–4.

<sup>236</sup> Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 357.

<sup>237</sup> But Mill's position will by no means be universally rejected; his preference in all art forms for true poetry over mere eloquence or oratory remarkably anticipates Michael Fried's well-known preference for painting's demonstrating "absorption" rather than "theatricality" in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), although Fried does not cite Mill.

<sup>238</sup> John Stuart Mill, "On Genius," in *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, 332–3.

poem or paint a picture,” while “in its true sense, that of originality in thought and action, though no one says that it is not a thing to be admired, nearly all, at heart, think they can do very well without it.”<sup>239</sup> But in Mill’s view, originality resulting in ineliminable variety in human thought, action, and feeling is the most valuable of human qualities:

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to.<sup>240</sup>

It should be noticed here that Mill’s point in this passage, drawn from Chapter III of *On Liberty*, is not the same as that of his famous argument for freedom of thought and expression in Chapter II. There he argues that a variety of experiments in ways of thinking and living<sup>241</sup> must be tolerated so that the truth – apparently including the truth about the best way to live – can emerge and be sustained against dogma, habit, and corruption, but here he clearly holds that there is no such thing as a single truth about how best to live, no single way of life that makes the race “better worth belonging to,” for it is variety itself that makes the race worth belonging to. Variety in artistic production and aesthetic experience is surely one of the forms of variety that make human life a noble and beautiful object of contemplation, although by no means the only one.

With this thought, Mill clearly dissociates himself from the idealization of the goal of universality in aesthetic judgment so typical of the eighteenth century and given its canonical formulation by Kant and instead associates himself with the more Romantic tradition of such figures as Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt, his literary hero in *On Liberty*. If an irremediable tension between the ideas of uniformity and variety in taste is a characteristic feature of modern aesthetic thought, then it is surely Mill rather than either of those less accessible German figures who has been the chief spokesman for the claims of variety.

John Ruskin is best known for his detailed description and criticism of painting and architecture in such works as his five-volume series *Modern Painters* (1843–60)

<sup>239</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in *Essays on Politics and Society*, ed. J. M. Robson, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 28 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 268.

<sup>240</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, 266.

<sup>241</sup> To borrow a famous phrase from Henry David Thoreau’s chapter “Economy” from *Walden*, in Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers; Walden; The Maine Woods; Cape Cod* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 368.

and the three-volume *Stones of Venice* (1851–3). He also argued for a Romantic version of socialism in a number of works, including *Unto This Last* (1862), *Time and Tide* (1867), and *Munera Pulveris* (1872). In his vast output,<sup>242</sup> there is nothing that can count as conventional work in philosophical aesthetics. But a few of his characteristic thoughts can be singled out as examples of his profound connection to the aesthetic thought of his predecessors and his equally profound influence on the aesthetic theories of his successors.<sup>243</sup> Let us consider first Ruskin's views on both the creation and the reception of art. Like many of his predecessors, Ruskin employs the concept of genius to characterize the nature of artistic production. Again like many of his predecessors, Ruskin also characterizes genius as originality. But what is crucial to Ruskin's understanding of originality or "genuineness" is that the artist (Ruskin invariably has in mind the visual artist) open himself up directly to nature rather than being influenced by prior and common artistic representations of his object: unlike "people in general" as well as artists who work "entirely on conventional principles," the genius – personified for Ruskin by the painter William Turner – does not compose pictures out of "fragments" and "reminiscences of old masters," does not copy others to make "what they thought would make a handsome picture";<sup>244</sup> rather, "the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way."<sup>245</sup> The thought that artistic success just requires an unmediated imitation of nature may sound antiquated and naïve, an idea from the previous century like Charles Batteux's reduction of beauty to the single principle of imitation of nature that was already lampooned by Moses Mendelssohn;<sup>246</sup> however, Ruskin adds a novel touch to the older doctrine by emphasizing that by opening his own imagination to nature itself the artistic genius leaves room for the audience or "beholder" of his work to do the same, to engage with nature on his own, so that the truly "imaginative work will not ... be rightly esteemed except by a mind of some corresponding power"<sup>247</sup> – a possibility that requires precisely that

<sup>242</sup> The standard edition of his works is the 39-volume Library Edition of *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1903–12).

<sup>243</sup> A work devoted specifically to Ruskin's aesthetic theory is George P. Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971). The same author's Modern Masters volume *Ruskin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) contains a useful guide to literature on Ruskin as of the time of its publication.

<sup>244</sup> From *Modern Painters*, vol. 1, quoted from John Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Philip Davis (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), 29, 33.

<sup>245</sup> From Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, in *Selected Writings*, 44.

<sup>246</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, "On the Main Principles of the Fine Arts and Sciences" (1757), in Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 170–1. Batteux's *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (Paris, 1746) was translated into German in 1751 by Johann Adolf Schlegel: *Herrn Abt Batteux: Einschränkung der schönen Künste auf einen einzigen Grundsatz* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1751).

<sup>247</sup> From Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 2, in *Selected Writings*, 91.

the productive genius not create images that will reduce the audience's response to mere convention. Such a requirement was perhaps implicit in Kant's insistence that the response to beauty, even artistic beauty, must always be a free play of imagination and understanding, but since Ruskin made the role of the audience's as well as the artist's imagination and originality explicit, this thought has rarely been absent from subsequent aesthetic theories.

The other fundamental theme in Ruskin's thought, namely, his insistence upon beauty as an experience of freedom, also ties him to the central tradition of modern aesthetic theory, indeed connects him directly to the conceptual world of Kant and Schiller. Perhaps Ruskin's single most famous piece of writing is his chapter on "The Nature of Gothic" in *The Stones of Venice*, in which he argues that in contrast to the regularity of structure and ornamentation in classical architecture, which could only be produced by a race of slaves or reproduced by machines, every exuberant imperfection in a work of Gothic architecture testifies to the freedom, wholeness, and nonalienation of the "thoughtful" laborers who have produced it.<sup>248</sup> Gothic architecture stands as an image of the liberty of the workmen who produced it, which shows "their weaknesses together with their strength."<sup>249</sup> Ruskin praises this for the Millian reason that "change or variety is as much a necessity to the human heart and brain in buildings as in books,"<sup>250</sup> but he also clearly thinks, as does Schiller, both that wholeness and nonalienation are necessary for modern man and that the image or expression of freedom in a beautiful object is morally uplifting. Ruskin also ties his admiration for the expression of the liberty of labor in Gothic architecture to his emphasis on the imagination of the audience as well as the artist: "These marked variations were, however, only permitted as part of the great system of perpetual change which ran through every member of Gothic design, and rendered it as endless a field for the beholder's inquiry as for the builder's imagination."<sup>251</sup>

Yet Ruskin does not simply think that exposure to fine art can by itself effect an improvement in the morals. On the contrary, he recognizes that beauty and morality exist in a delicate symbiosis, each depending upon or at least benefiting from advances in the other. This is the message of his insightful chapter on "The Relation of Art to Use" in the 1870 *Lectures on Art* given at the University of London. This chapter begins by asserting that "the entire use of art depends upon its being either full of truth, or full of use; and that, however pleasant, wonderful or impressive it may be in itself, it must yet be of inferior kind ... unless it has clearly one of these as its main objects, – either *to state a true thing*, or to *adorn*

<sup>248</sup> Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, 194–207.

<sup>249</sup> Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, 203.

<sup>250</sup> Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, 207.

<sup>251</sup> Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, 211.

a serviceable one.”<sup>252</sup> On the assumption that both truth and utility derive their own value from morality, which Ruskin surely makes, this implies that the value of art ultimately depends upon its serviceability to morality. In the most concrete terms, “*You cannot have a landscape by Turner, without a country for him to paint; you cannot have a portrait by Titian, without a man to be portrayed.*”<sup>253</sup> At the same time, however, Ruskin also argues that both knowledge of truth and utility, thus morality itself, can only flourish in a climate of beauty preserved, enhanced, and transmitted by human art. For example, “it is not possible to have any right morality, happiness, or art, in any country where the cities are ... clotted and coagulated, spots of dreadful mildew, spreading by patches and blotches over the country they consume. You must have lovely cities, crystallized, not coagulated, into form.”<sup>254</sup> Yet Ruskin takes care to avoid any suggestion that moral improvement is a *sufficient* condition for artistic advance or that artistic advance is a sufficient condition for moral development; his language suggests that each is at most a *necessary* condition for the other.

Thus Ruskin returns to the modest Kantian position that the experience of natural and artistic beauty can be useful for the promotion of morality without by itself sufficing to bring about the moral kingdom of heaven upon Earth. Even this thoughtful conclusion to the long debate about the relation between aesthetics and morality that was the central issue for aesthetics from 1790 to 1870 would come under fire in subsequent decades, especially after the apparent self-immolation of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the trenches of World War I and the concentration camps of World War II. But that is a story for another volume.

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<sup>252</sup> John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art* (New York: Allworth Press, 1996), 140.

<sup>253</sup> Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, 151.

<sup>254</sup> Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, 157.

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**V**

**ETHICS**



# AUTONOMY AND THE SELF AS THE BASIS OF MORALITY

BERNARD REGINSTER

## THE SOURCE OF NORMATIVITY AND THE PARADOXES OF SELF-LEGISLATION

In the Preface to the *Grundlegung*, Kant announces that he will pursue two main objectives, respectively, to “seek out” and then to “establish” the “supreme principle of morality.”<sup>1</sup> The first objective is achieved in the first two sections of the

<sup>1</sup> Kant, G 4:395.

Reference edition of Kant’s works: *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, Ausgabe der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1910). CPpR, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1985) [cited by Akademie edition volume and page numbers in the margins]. G, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) [cited by Akademie edition volume and page numbers in the margins]. LE, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. L. Infield (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1963) [cited by page numbers]. MM, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) [cited by Akademie edition volume and page numbers in the margins]. R, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960) [cited by page numbers].

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book, in what is an essentially *descriptive* enterprise. Kant shows there that morally good actions are those actions done from duty, regardless of one's inclinations, and proceeds to derive from this idea of acting from duty a supreme moral principle, on the basis of which the moral agent can determine with what particular duty he is expected to comply in particular circumstances – the categorical imperative. In the book's third section, Kant then turns to the *normative* question, which arises out of the skeptical worry that morality might be little more than "a phantom of the brain," or that those moral obligations we take to be objective and unconditional are in fact not rational requirements at all, but mere fantasies.<sup>2</sup>

In a few transitional pages at the end of the second section, Kant develops a view that forms a crucial preliminary to the argument of the final section. Before he can attempt to establish the normative authority of the supreme principle of morality he described previously, he must specify where that authority must be sought in the first place – that is to say, he must formulate a view about the *source of normativity*. Suppose we are told that we should help the needy, and we want to know whether this is a legitimate requirement. To go about answering that question, we must first figure out what to look for – or what will *count* as a justification of this claim.

of *Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) [cited by paragraph numbers]. SC, *The Spirit of Christianity*, in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 182–301 [cited by page numbers].

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Schelling: SW, *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, 14 vols. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–61). All the quotations are from vol. VII, from the essay "Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit, ..." also known as the *Freiheitschrift*, in my translation [cited by page numbers].

Kierkegaard: SD, *Sickness unto Death: Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980).

Schlegel and Schleiermacher: Frederick C. Beiser, *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) [cited by page numbers].

<sup>2</sup> Kant, G 4:445.

Kant organizes in two broad categories existing views about the source of moral normativity.<sup>3</sup> Those that find the basis of morality in a “principle of *perfection*” maintain that the normative authority of moral claims is rooted either in the perfection of our nature or in the perfection of God’s will. In this case, to find out whether benevolence is a moral duty, we simply have to ask whether it is a requirement of the perfection of our nature or whether it is God’s will. And those that find the basis of morality in a “principle of *happiness*” state that the normative authority of moral claims has its source in the desires and inclinations of moral agents, whether these proceed from “natural” or from “moral” feelings. In this case, we find out whether benevolence is a requirement by asking whether it contributes to the agent’s happiness, either by satisfying his natural inclinations generally or by gratifying those particular inclinations that proceed from his moral sense.

Kant summarily rejects all of these views. The chief problem with the idea of the perfection of our own nature is that it is simply too “indefinite” to ground the normative authority of morality. The idea is so indefinite, indeed, that those who rely upon it surreptitiously depend on existing moral claims to which they already implicitly grant authority to give it a determinate content.<sup>4</sup> The appeal to the perfection of God’s will does not fare any better. Suppose we find out that the duty of benevolence is in fact God’s will; would we have thereby established its normative authority for us? Kant thinks not: that benevolence is God’s will matters to us either because we fear the consequences of disobeying him, in which case the source of normative authority is in our inclinations, or because we recognize that God commands only what is rationally required, in which case the source of normative authority lies in the rational credentials of benevolence. In neither case is God’s will as such the source of normativity.<sup>5</sup>

Kant’s objection to those views that ground morality in happiness, by placing the source of normativity in the agent’s existing inclinations, is, in the first place, that they cannot account for *moral* normativity since they cannot in principle account for the *categorical* character of moral requirements.<sup>6</sup> But the objection goes deeper still. Kant also believes that inclinations cannot be the source of normativity *at all* because of the way in which he conceives of them: they are “alien influences,”<sup>7</sup> which we experience as “blind” forces assailing us from the

<sup>3</sup> Kant, G 4:441–2.

<sup>4</sup> Kant, G 4:443.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, G 4:443. In *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), J. B. Schneewind has shown in detail how the critique of theological voluntarism plays a particularly central role in Kant’s “invention of autonomy” (see especially 510–12).

<sup>6</sup> Kant, G 4:442.

<sup>7</sup> Kant, G 4:446.

outside, as it were. As a consequence, the sole fact that we find ourselves inclined to a certain end does not, in and of itself, constitute a reason for us to pursue it. This inclination can acquire normative significance only through ratification by an independent rational authority.<sup>8</sup> And even those inclinations cultivated out of a moral concern remain blind, if not alien, insofar as they are themselves not capable of reflecting the normative standing of the actions to which they incline the agent.

As it turns out, the views of the source of normativity reviewed here share a common fundamental defect. They place the source of normative authority in factors that lie *outside* agency and in so doing leave open a gap, which I propose to call the *normative gap*. Specifically, it looks as though the facts that are presented as sources of normativity (the idea of human perfection, God's will, or the agent's inclinations) fail to provide it, unless the individual's agency contributes something, so to speak, to endow them with their authority.

This leads Kant to the revolutionary proposal that sets the stage for the argument of *Grundlegung* III: bridging the normative gap by locating the source of normativity *within the agent* himself, specifically in his *autonomous agency*: "We simply showed by developing the generally received concept of morality that an autonomy of the will is unavoidably bound up with it, or rather its very foundation. Thus whoever holds morality to be something and not a chimerical idea without any truth must also admit the principle of morality brought forward here."<sup>9</sup> In this view, the normative authority of moral laws for an agent lies in the fact that these are laws *he gave to himself*: "Hence the will is not merely subject to the law, but subject to it in such a way that it must be regarded as also giving law to itself and just because of this as first subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author)."<sup>10</sup> I will call this the *autonomy view* of normativity.

Reflection quickly reveals, however, that the coherence of this autonomy view of normativity is threatened by apparently fatal paradoxes. On the one hand, if the moral agent is not bound to any external authority, if there are no constraints on his legislative activity, normativity seems to become little more than a matter of arbitrary whim:<sup>11</sup> any practical claim, including patently immoral claims,

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that, in and of themselves, inclinations have no normative significance *at all*. Unless we are prepared to consider permissible actions irrational, they must find their rational justification in some inclination, for the mere moral permissibility of an action is not a reason to perform it. Nevertheless, Kant holds that the *determinate* normative significance of any given inclination can only be established through reflection from a purely rational standpoint.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, G 4:445.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, G 4:431; see 438.

<sup>11</sup> This is the view apparently favored by the German romantics. It underwrites, for example, Schlegel's claim that "absolute freedom," which he takes to be the "highest good," entails social "anarchy," and it motivates Schleiermacher's endorsement of a "right as an individual to tear oneself away from this common possession [of humanity]." See F. Beiser, ed., *The Early Political*

can have normative authority, provided the agent wills it. It follows that, far from providing the source of moral normativity, the autonomy view could rather end up justifying all kinds of immorality. Moreover, placing the source of normative authority in the agent's will seems not so much to explain it as to explain it *away*, for the very idea of normative authority is the idea of something that can legitimately *constrain* the will. If the authority of a law depends on its being willed by the agent, then no law can ever legitimately conflict with, and therefore constrain, the will.<sup>12</sup> If moral laws are truly self-given, it is hard to see how they could still be *laws*, that is to say, legitimate sources of constraining obligations. If, on the other hand, there are significant constraints on the agent's legislative activity, then in what sense does this activity remain autonomous? If he can regard the laws produced by this activity as genuinely constraining obligations, he must be identified (at least in part) with the volitions that are constrained by these laws (for example, those grounded in his inclinations), in which case they can no longer be properly regarded as *self-given*.<sup>13</sup>

In what follows, I examine how a number of significant philosophers came to terms with these difficulties in attempting to determine what sense, if any, could be made of the idea of a legislation that genuinely constrains (normatively) the self, even though it proceeds from it. Although there are other significant difficulties raised by the autonomy view of moral normativity, the most important among which I shall mention in the closing section of this study, I find it helpful to frame my survey in terms of the two difficulties created by the paradox of self-legislation.<sup>14</sup> Since the autonomy view of normativity originates with Kant, I shall begin with an examination of his own solutions to them.

*Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 155 and 175, respectively.

<sup>12</sup> This problem is raised, for instance, by Hegel when he observes that "this implies that objective goodness is merely something constructed by my conviction, sustained by me alone, and that I, as lord and master, can make it come and go [as I please]. As soon as I relate myself to something objective, it ceases to exist for me, and so I am poised above an immense void, conjuring up shapes and destroying them" (PR §140A). Kierkegaard also notes the problem and bases on it his rejection of the view that the source of moral normativity should be found in the self: "The self is its own master, absolutely its own master. . . . On closer examination, however, it is easy to see that this absolute ruler is a king without a country, actually ruling over nothing; his position, his sovereignty, is subordinate to the dialectic that rebellion is legitimate at any moment" (SD 69).

<sup>13</sup> This problem is raised at least implicitly by the early romantic followers and critics of Kant, such as Schlegel, who compares unfavorably the "freedom of the will" involved in "morality" with "absolute freedom" (see Beiser, ed., *Early Political Writings*, 155), and quite explicitly by Schiller: "As it [the moral law] speaks only to forbid, and against the interests of his sensuous self-love, it must appear to him as something alien" (LAE 24th Letter, 117–18; cf. GD 367).

<sup>14</sup> This means that my approach to the various authors considered here will be framed by, and therefore limited to, their contributions to the issues raised by the autonomy view of moral normativity. It goes without saying that these are by no means their only contributions to moral philosophy.



## KANT

If moral requirements are categorical, or universally and necessarily valid, their authority cannot be based on appeals to empirical or contingent interests, such as the agent's inclinations. Kant argues that if an agent is not bound to a principle by a contingent interest, the only possible source of its normative authority must be found in the nature of the agent's own will. Indeed, this view of the source of moral normativity inspires a distinctive formulation of its supreme principle: "Every rational being, as an end in itself, would have to be able to regard itself at the same time as universally legislative in regard to all laws to which it may be subject."<sup>15</sup> More than simply another formulation of the categorical imperative, however, the idea of self-legislation clearly is intended to capture a general feature of the source of moral normativity. Precisely how this autonomy view of normativity should be understood has become a matter of contention.

According to the (currently popular) *constructivist* interpretation, the claim that the authority of moral laws has its source in the agent's will means that it is, in a certain sense, the product of the agent's volitional activity, rather than the reflection of an independent order of values.<sup>16</sup> The main challenge for constructivism is that a law whose authority so depends on the volitional activity of an agent seems bound to be a purely arbitrary or positive law, that is to say, a law whose authority depends on the agent's contingent interest in compliance, and so is not a categorical imperative. The most sophisticated versions of constructivism avoid this problem by arguing that an agent's volitional activity produces genuine laws only when it follows a specific procedure, namely, the universalization procedure.

The universalization procedure consists in asking whether the principle on which the agent proposes to act is also one on which he could consistently will everyone else to act. It is precisely meant to determine whether that principle has the "form of law" and so may qualify as a universally valid requirement. In very broad strokes, the idea is that if an agent acts on a principle he cannot consistently will everyone else to follow, then he must be making an exception of himself, and he cannot take himself to be acting on the basis of universally valid reasons.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, G 4:438.

<sup>16</sup> This approach to Kant's moral theory was first articulated by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 256, who eventually described it as "the leading historical example of a constructivist doctrine" (see his "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 [1980]: 515–17, 556). This constructivist approach has found a vigorous recent articulation in Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), where she argues that in Kant's view, "values are not discovered by intuition to be 'out there' in the world.... Values are created by human beings ... constructed by a procedure, the procedure of making laws for ourselves" (112).

Since moral action is action based on universally valid reasons, it demands that the agent deliberate in accordance with the universalization procedure.<sup>17</sup>

This procedure, to be sure, constrains the agent's volitional activity, but far from undermining his autonomy, this constraint actually *constitutes* it, by endowing his volitional activity with legislative authority, much as a parliament's authority to make laws depends on its following procedures laid down in a constitution. Thus, an agent cannot make genuine *laws* – cannot be “universally legislative” – unless he complies with the universalization procedure. It follows that an agent cannot decree any arbitrary principle to be a moral law. This, however, disarms only the objection that the *content* of the moral law is arbitrary. Insofar as it makes the authority of this law depend upon the volitional activity of the agent, the constructivist interpretation still seems liable to the objection that its *authority* is arbitrary. The constructivist interpretation of the autonomy view suggests that a moral law will be binding on the agent only if he has actually carried out the reasoning that makes it a law. As a consequence, even if its content is constrained by a certain procedure that his reasoning must follow, its authority, dependent as it is on whether he actually carries out the relevant reasoning, is contingent upon the vagaries of his psychological life. To avoid this difficulty, sophisticated constructivists observe that the categorical character of moral laws also suggests that an individual agent is subject to moral laws whether or not he actually carries out the reasoning that makes them laws. Kant only requires that he “can regard” himself as the legislator of those laws,<sup>18</sup> which appears to imply that this reasoning must only be *available* to him, whether he actually carries it out or not.<sup>19</sup>

Although widespread, this constructivist interpretation has recently been strongly challenged on both philosophical and exegetical grounds. In the broadest

<sup>17</sup> The precise shape of Kant's derivation of the categorical imperative is a notoriously vexing issue, which I cannot address adequately here. For a recent and comprehensive examination of this issue, see Samuel Kerstein, *Kant's Search for the Supreme Principle of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); see also Christine Korsgaard, “Kant's Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of *Foundations* I,” *Monist* 72, no. (1989): 311–40.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, G 4:431.

<sup>19</sup> In “Legislating the Moral Law,” *Nous* 28 (1994): 435–64, and “Autonomy of the Will and the Foundation of Morality,” in *Agency and Autonomy in Kant's Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 121–72, Andrews Reath develops a particularly sophisticated constructivist interpretation of Kant. Central to this interpretation is his claim that the categorical imperative, insofar as it defines a higher-order principle in accordance with which all practical deliberation ought to be conducted, should not be seen as an external constraint on the agent's legislative capacity, but rather as *constitutive* of this capacity: “a normative procedure which a legislative agent is bound to follow in order to give law also creates the possibility of exercising authority, because it binds other agents to accept the results of this procedure when properly carried out” (Reath, “Legislating the Moral Law,” 455). No decree produced by an agent's volitional activity may count as a universally valid law unless it is actually rationally binding on other agents, and the only way in which the agent's volitional activity can produce such a law is by following the universalization procedure.

terms, the philosophical objection is that even in its most sophisticated form, constructivism ultimately cannot account for the unconditional validity of moral laws. If normative authority depends on an act of will, whereby the agent gives himself *new* laws to which he was not subject prior to this volitional act, then it can hardly be unconditional. And invoking the universalization procedure as a constraint on this volitional activity does not seem so much to solve this problem as to alter its form, for the constructivist must now justify his reliance on the universalization procedure, and if he deems it correct, as it seems that he should, because it is itself a product of volitional activity, *this* volitional activity cannot itself be held to conform to this procedure and is haunted again by the problem of arbitrariness (of *content*).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, if the *authority* of the law for an agent does not depend on his actually carrying out the reasoning that makes it a law and so is not contingent upon the vagaries of his psychological life, it seems as though this authority must therefore be independent from that reasoning, which may then only reveal, rather than construct, it.<sup>21</sup>

The chief exegetical objection to constructivist interpretations of Kantian moral theory is that they appear to ignore Kant's very own insistence that the law of autonomy is objectively valid because it is grounded in the objective worth of rational nature as an end in itself. Consider, for example, the following passage: "The essence of things does not alter through their external relations, and it is in accordance with that which alone constitutes the absolute worth of the human being, without thinking of such relations, that he must be judged by whoever it may be, even by the highest being."<sup>22</sup> Human beings have worth not by virtue of a volitional act (not even an act of God's will), but by virtue of their very *essence*, and they have this worth "absolutely," irrespective of their relations to other things.

Such critics of the constructivist interpretation of Kant's autonomy theory of normativity advocate a *realist* interpretation. In this interpretation, the idea of autonomy continues to account for the possibility of categorical obligation: since the authority of the moral law cannot be found in some contingent interest, it must be found in the agent's own will. But this claim is now taken to mean that the authority of the moral law is not produced by the deliberative activity of the

<sup>20</sup> In *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Allen Wood raises this sort of objection to the constructivist interpretation of Kant (see 91, 97, 105–7, 164, 182).

<sup>21</sup> Sophisticated constructivists might deny that this sort of contingency on the vagaries of psychological life is implied by constructivism. They might propose to regard certain normative commitments, including the commitment to the moral law, as *constitutive* of deliberative agency and therefore inescapable constraints on the will of every agent. On this point, see R. J. Wallace, "Constructing Normativity," *Philosophical Topics* 32 (2004): 451–76, who also offers a sympathetic, nuanced account of constructivism but who is critical of its ability to establish the normative authority of the moral law.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, G 4:439.

will, but is grounded in its objective intrinsic worth. They argue that the normative standing of the categorical imperative as a formal principle constraining all practical deliberation lies in the simple fact that it is the law of the rational will or that it is grounded in the very nature of practical reason.<sup>23</sup>

In this realist interpretation, the moral law is self-legislated not insofar as it is created by an act of will, but insofar as it is given by the very nature of the will.<sup>24</sup> This realist interpretation does not so much solve the problem of self-legislation as it avoids it altogether: it accounts for the possibility of a law that is genuinely constraining even though it has its source in the agent's own will by simply placing the source of its authority in objective facts about the nature of this will.<sup>25</sup> But what does it mean to say that the moral law is given by the very nature of the will?

Kant defines the will as "a kind of causality belonging to living beings insofar as they are rational."<sup>26</sup> To have a will is to have the ability to make things happen in a certain way, which is peculiar to rational agents. By the "causality" of an action, Kant refers generally to what explains why it took place. In speaking of the causality of beings "insofar as they are rational," he presumably indicates that explanations that appeal to an agent's will are *rationalizing* explanations. All explanations account for the occurrence of an event A by pointing to the occurrence of an event R, together with a law connecting R with A. The crucial implication of this conception of the will as a kind of causality is that there is no willing without conformity to a law. The occurrence of R cannot explain why A takes place, unless the relation between R and A falls under a law. Hence, if the will is indeed a kind of causality, then it must be governed by a law. The distinctive mark of a rationalizing explanation is that the law on which it depends is a *normative* law – the law that whenever R occurs, then A *ought* to follow.

"Autonomy of the will is the property the will has of being a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition)."<sup>27</sup> According to

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Kain puts it well in "Self-Legislation in Kant's Moral Philosophy," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 86 (2004): 257–306: "The authority of the moral law cannot be grounded in reason's recognition of the nature of something *else* or even in contingent facts about itself. Rather the supreme principle of morality must itself be the law of practical reason. . . . If there is an unconditional practical principle such as the moral law, Kant concludes, it must be given by the nature of reason itself, given in and not simply given to reason" (288).

<sup>24</sup> This particular understanding of the nature of legislation is found by proponents of the realist interpretation in a passage from the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, in which Kant distinguishes between the law's "author" and the law's "legislator" (MM 6:227).

<sup>25</sup> The advocates of Kantian normative realism do not, however, address the fact noted by Wallace, in "Constructing Normativity," that "constructivism is the only serious *theory* of normativity on the contemporary scene," whereas normative realism only "postulates normative facts or truths, while abandoning the aspiration to provide a philosophical explanation of them" (452).

<sup>26</sup> Kant, G 4:446.

<sup>27</sup> Kant, G 4:440.

this definition, when my will serves my inclinations, the law that governs its “causality” is determined by the relevant properties of the objects of those inclinations. It is the properties of bread, for example, that make it worth willing when I am hungry. Hence, the law of my willing does not in this case proceed from the will itself: it is what Kant calls a “hypothetical imperative,” that is to say, an imperative binding on me not insofar as I am a rational agent, but only insofar as I am a rational agent *with this or that inclination*. When it does not serve my inclinations, my will is free or self-determining, but it is still governed by a law: “To conceive of oneself as a freely acting being and yet as exempt from the law which is appropriate to such a being (the moral law) would be tantamount to conceiving a cause operating without any laws whatsoever (for determination according to natural laws is excluded by the fact of freedom); this is a self-contradiction.”<sup>28</sup> As we saw earlier, Kant famously (and controversially) argues that the categorical imperative, or the moral law, is the only law the will, understood as pure practical reason, gives to itself and so the only law with which compliance is in keeping with its autonomy.<sup>29</sup>

The Kantian doctrine of autonomy, whether we interpret it along constructivist or realist lines,<sup>30</sup> is meant to show how categorical imperatives are “possible”: they are possible only if they are “legislated” by the agent’s own self. But categorical imperatives, that is to say, *pure* rational requirements, can be seen to emanate from the agent himself only if his “true self [*eigentliche Selbst*]” is conceived as pure “intelligence,”<sup>31</sup> answering to his own pure reasons, independent of his inclinations, or any other contingent interests. Agents are subject to the moral law, then,

<sup>28</sup> Kant, R 30.

<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting, following a number of recent scholars, that so-called hypothetical imperatives are laws the rational will “gives itself” as much as categorical imperatives. That I should will the necessary means to my ends is rationally binding on me, regardless of whether I actually have an inclination for these ends. The distinction of categorical imperatives is that they can dictate ends, which may then count as “ends of reason” or “objective ends,” whereas hypothetical imperatives only determine means for ends, which may be supplied by the agent’s inclinations and therefore purely “subjective.” See Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 159–87, for a version of this argument that is sensitive to this issue. For the argument that the authority of hypothetical imperatives is grounded in the fact that “efficacy” is a constitutive aim of the will, see Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> The debate between the constructivist and realist interpretations of Kantian theory is recent and, therefore, far from settled. Constructivists would presumably object that the apprehension of normative facts, which realism presupposes, might require the kind of rational intuition that Kant notoriously repudiates in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. (They might also point out, furthermore, that the realist reliance on moral facts reopens the normative gap the theory of autonomy was supposed to bridge, by leaving it unclear how the apprehension of such alleged normative facts gains motivational traction on the agent.) (See Andrews Reath, “The Categorical Imperative and Kant’s Conception of Practical Rationality,” *Monist* 72 [1989]: 384–410; Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*.)

<sup>31</sup> Kant, G 4:457–8.

only if their self can be so conceived. Showing that the self of agents must be conceived as pure “intelligence” and therefore that there are moral reasons is the object of the final section of the *Grundlegung*.

The argument is notoriously difficult, in part because its precise objective is unclear. As it is developed in the first few pages, the argument seems intended to convince not a *normative skeptic*, or someone who doubts that we have *any* reason to act, or that we are agents at all, but only a *moral skeptic*, or someone who takes himself to have reasons to act but doubts he has reasons to act *morally*.<sup>32</sup> But as it proceeds further into the section, the argument seems intended to target the normative skeptic, by showing that we actually are agents of the relevant sort. But it remains a matter of controversy whether and how the argument is supposed to achieve that ambitious objective.<sup>33</sup>

I will focus here on the more modest version of the argument, partly because it seems to have exercised the greater influence both on some of Kant’s successors (such as Schopenhauer) and on contemporary readers. The strategy of the argument consists in showing that anyone who takes himself to have reasons to act and so adopts the deliberative point of view is thereby committed to unconditional reasons or principles, that is to say, reasons and principles independent of inclinations, and therefore to moral reasons or principles.

Kant begins his argument with the claim that rational agents are negatively free “from the practical point of view,” or that they necessarily operate “under the idea of freedom.”<sup>34</sup> In claiming that rational agents are free “from the practical point of view,” Kant is not invoking a special concept of freedom, but specifying a restriction of the point of view from which they are free. It is only insofar as I regard myself “practically,” namely, as an *agent* who deliberates about what to do, that I must think of myself as free. I am not entitled to the same claim when I consider myself “theoretically,” as a mere *object* in the world. In deliberating, I make up my mind, or I determine myself on the basis of reasons. There is no deliberation, and no self-determination, where there is no freedom. Regarding

<sup>32</sup> Among those who read the argument in this way, see Reath, “The Categorical Imperative”; Thomas Hill, “Kant’s Argument for the Rationality of Morality,” in *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant’s Moral Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 97–122; and Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Allison (in *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 214–29), Dieter Henrich (in “Kant’s Deduction of the Moral Law: The Reasons for the Obscurity of the Final Section of Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*,” in *Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer [Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998], 303–41), and Paul Guyer (in “Naturalistic and Transcendental Moments in Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” *Inquiry* 50 [2007]: 444–64) emphasize the shortcomings of this more radical version of the argument. By contrast, in *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 51–65, Onora O’Neill develops an interesting construal of this argument by tying practical to theoretical reason.

<sup>34</sup> Kant, G 4:448.

my will as free, as determinable by itself alone, is *constitutive* of the deliberative point of view. As soon as I adopt a theoretical “spectator’s stance” on my will, I leave the deliberative stance, for to contemplate passively the struggle for dominance among my various contingent interests is not to deliberate about what to do, and the mere acknowledgment that one of them has finally prevailed is not an act of self-determination.<sup>35</sup>

When I deliberate, I stand back from my particular desires and inclinations and decide whether to endorse some of them and allow them to move me to action. Kant draws two crucial consequences from this picture of deliberation. First, it follows that when I deliberate, I must see my *self* as something over and above these desires and inclinations, since it must determine what is worth desiring in the first place, and so I experience these as “alien” or outside my self.<sup>36</sup> Second, it follows that the self that so deliberates answers only to its own normative agenda, to reasons that are independent of the agent’s inclinations or other contingent interests.

What follows is a simplified presentation of Kant’s argument, as I believe at least some of his successors to have understood it:<sup>37</sup>

- (1) To be a rational agent is to deliberate about what to do.
- (2) To deliberate about what to do, I must regard my will as free.
- (3) To regard my will as free is to regard it, in particular, as not determined by the inclinations I happen to have.
- (4) The point of view from which I deliberate is therefore independent of these inclinations.
- (5) Any deliberation requires normative standards by the light of which it is conducted (by which I determine which inclinations to pursue).

<sup>35</sup> This important Kantian idea is not easy to circumscribe. Here is a brief elaboration of it. I cannot be causally determined to act from a norm because the relevant relation of the norm to my action is simply not causal, but rational. The invocation of a norm is primarily intended to make sense of my action or to justify it not to supply its causal determinant. In acting *from* a norm, I take a certain consideration as the ground on which I determine myself to act, and not as a lever in the causal network, with determinate and predictable effects on my behavior. And this implies, accordingly, not treating *myself* as an element in that causal network either and my behavior as susceptible to causal determination by that norm. Arguably, this amounts to regarding myself as *free*.

<sup>36</sup> Korsgaard, in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, puts it well: “When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all of your desires, something which is *you*, and which *chooses* which desire to act on. This means that the principle or law by which you determine your actions is one that you regard as being expressive of *yourself*” (100).

<sup>37</sup> This presentation of the argument is simplified because it omits Kant’s analysis of the concept of freedom in terms of “negative” and “positive” freedom. For a detailed presentation of this argument, see Hill, “Kant’s Argument for the Rationality of Morality.” I also leave out entirely the alternative version of the argument Kant offers in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, based on the so-called fact of reason, in part because this version of the argument has been less influential (and less philosophically tantalizing). See Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, chap. 13, for a discussion of that alternative argument.

- (6) The standards available from the deliberative point of view must therefore be themselves independent of those contingent inclinations – they must be, in other words, unconditional or objective standards (“pure reasons”), binding on all rational agents insofar as they are rational.

The crucial hinge of this argument is the implicit understanding of the negative freedom of the deliberative standpoint, which Kant defines as follows: “freedom would be the property of this causality that makes it effective independent of any determination by alien causes.”<sup>38</sup> This definition is ambiguous. On the one hand, it might mean absence of *causal determination*, in particular determination by inclinations that would causally direct or push the will in a certain direction. But, on the other hand, it also appears to mean absence of *rational determination* by the inclinations, namely, the ability to act for reasons other than those rooted in our inclinations. Kant certainly intends negative freedom to be understood in the latter sense, since it is supposed to be the flip side of a “positive freedom,” which is conceived as autonomy, or determination of the will by its own law. We shall see later (particularly in our examination of Schopenhauer) how this crucial aspect of the argument might also be a fatal weakness.

#### FICHTE

Fichte’s objective is to place Kant’s conception of morality, which he endorses, on a firmer foundation. He accepts from Kant the fundamental idea that the source of moral normativity is to be found in the self-legislation of the will but develops a different kind of solution to the problem of its very possibility. To say that autonomy is the source of normativity is to say that a law has authority for me only if it has its origin in my own will, in self-legislation. The central problem with this view is to explain how a law that is a decree of my own will could be nonarbitrary and, indeed, a *law* at all, since by its very nature a law must be able to constrain my will. Like Kant, Fichte thinks that the solution to this problem lies in an analysis of the concept of will, and he ends up developing a particular (constructivist) view of the relation between the will and practical laws.<sup>39</sup>

Fichte opens his *System of Ethics* with the claim “I find myself as myself only as willing”<sup>40</sup> and proceeds to characterize willing as “a real determining of oneself

<sup>38</sup> Kant, G 4:446.

<sup>39</sup> The debate between constructivism and realism, recent as it is in Kantian moral philosophy, is only beginning to influence the interpretation of post-Kantian philosophers. I propose here a constructivist interpretation of Fichte. In “Kierkegaard’s Ethicist: The Place of Fichte in Kierkegaard’s Construction of the Ethical,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (2006), Michelle Kosch explicitly claims that Fichte’s account of moral normativity should be interpreted along constructivist lines.

<sup>40</sup> Fichte, SE §1, 24.



through oneself.”<sup>41</sup> This is precisely what distinguishes willing from merely wishing or desiring: whereas the latter is a passive experience of inclination, the former involves an active “decision [*Entschluss*],” namely, the decision to pursue the object of some desire. It follows that, unlike for wishing and desiring, one may say that “the will gives itself its object absolutely.”<sup>42</sup> Fichte describes this fundamental act of will as essentially “free,” in the sense that it is “something primary which is grounded absolutely in itself and in nothing outside itself.”<sup>43</sup> As such, it “cannot be explained on the basis of any influence of some thing outside the I, but only on the basis of the I itself.”<sup>44</sup>

Willing thus presupposes negatively the ability to abstract from my present inclinations, but also, positively, the ability to choose among them on the basis of what Fichte calls a “purposive concept [*Zweckbegriff*],” that is to say, the conception of a particular purpose or end, which finds articulation in a “maxim.”<sup>45</sup> An action done in accordance with a maxim is free only if the maxim “becomes a maxim through an act of my own freedom. Were it not a product of my own freedom, then all other freedom would be abolished, since everything else follows necessarily and according to a fixed rule from the maxim in question.”<sup>46</sup> And a maxim is freely chosen, according to Fichte, only when I give it to myself through “absolute spontaneity.”<sup>47</sup>

This, however, hardly suffices for a full-fledged account of self-determination, for the notion of “absolute spontaneity,” such as it is, leaves open the possibility that a spontaneous choice could be purely arbitrary. And if this is so, it is hard to see in what sense the agent’s choice could still meaningfully count as “his own,” or proceed “only on the basis of the I itself,” for one thing, and, for another, how the idea of self-legislation could rule out immoral norms. We therefore need a plausible account of the sense in which a maxim can be “constructed by myself” that satisfactorily addresses these concerns. Choosing in truly autonomous fashion requires, for Fichte, that I reflect upon my “true essence”<sup>48</sup> and make choices that are in accord with that essence, choices that are, in some sense, expressions

<sup>41</sup> Fichte, SE §1, 28. This crucial claim draws on Fichte’s groundbreaking views on the self and subjectivity, which I must here take for granted. In “Fichte’s Original Insight” (in *Contemporary German Philosophy*, trans. D. Lachterman [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982], 1:15–53), Dieter Henrich offers an illuminating and penetrating analysis of Fichte’s conception of the self, particularly in connection with the possibility of self-consciousness, and in *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Frederick Neuhouser systematically develops its implications for both theoretical and practical philosophy.

<sup>42</sup> Fichte, SE §14, 150.

<sup>43</sup> Fichte, SE §1, 30.

<sup>44</sup> Fichte, SE §1, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Fichte, SE §16, 170.

<sup>46</sup> Fichte, SE §16, 170–1.

<sup>47</sup> Fichte, SE §16, 170–1.

<sup>48</sup> Fichte, SE §1, 30.

of who I really am. But this raises two questions: First, what is my true essence? Second, how can this essence be a source of normativity?

To answer the first question, Fichte claims that we must “think away all that is foreign in willing,” and once we do so, we discover that the true essence of the will lies in its absolute “self-sufficiency [*Selbständigkeit*].”<sup>49</sup> This self-sufficiency is made manifest in “reflection,” the distinctive activity of the deliberating agent in which “the I tears itself loose from all that is supposed to lie outside of it, brings itself under its own control, and positions itself [*stellt sich hin*] as absolutely self-sufficient.”<sup>50</sup> This true essence of the will is in turn supposed to yield the supreme principle of morality: “The principle of morality is the necessary thought of the intellect that it ought to determine its freedom in accordance with the concept of self-sufficiency, absolutely and without exception.”<sup>51</sup>

To understand what acting in accordance with the concept of self-sufficiency amounts to, we must obviously supply an analysis of this concept. In the most general terms, Fichte defines self-sufficiency as “absolute undeterminability [*Unbestimmbarkeit*] by anything other than the I,”<sup>52</sup> but this definition is not devoid of ambiguity.<sup>53</sup> The most prominent interpretation of this formula in Fichte’s text is in terms of independence of determination by “natural drives,” that is to say, the condition in which “the determination of the will has no ground outside of itself” but is “grounded in and through itself.”<sup>54</sup> But Fichte also alludes to a different interpretation of self-sufficiency, according to which it consists of such a mastery over the powers of nature that they can now be said to be dependent upon me, and not I dependent upon them: “As has often been pointed out, self-sufficiency, which is our ultimate goal, consists in everything depending on me and my not depending on anything, in everything that I will to occur in my entire sensible world occurring purely and simply because I will for it to occur.”<sup>55</sup>

In the first sense, self-sufficiency simply is the ability to *make* free choices, whereas in the second sense, it is also the ability to *implement* these choices in the objective circumstances of the (sensible) world. Consequently, determining oneself “in accordance with the concept of self-sufficiency” might mean different things. The choice to drink alcohol in excess or to join a brainwashing cult would presumably be incompatible with my self-sufficiency in the first sense, insofar as they would obviously end up depriving me of the ability to make free

<sup>49</sup> Fichte, SE §3, 54ff.

<sup>50</sup> Fichte, SE §19, 127. Recall, in this connection, the central insight that Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, attributes to Kant, cited in note 21 earlier.

<sup>51</sup> Fichte, SE §3, 60.

<sup>52</sup> Fichte, SE §3, 58.

<sup>53</sup> Neuhauser, *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity*, 137–43, offers a detailed analysis of this ambiguity.

<sup>54</sup> Fichte, SE §14, 152; cf. §1, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Fichte, SE §18, 217.

choices. And my refusal to develop my talents, for example, seems incompatible with my self-sufficiency in the second sense, insofar as this undermines my ability to implement those choices.<sup>56</sup>

We may now turn to the second of the two questions we raised earlier: What claim has this concept of self-sufficiency to be the source of moral normativity? So far, we have only established that a choice I make is a case of full self-determination if it is made in accordance with norms rooted in the concept of my true essence as self-sufficiency. But we have yet to show why I should care about acting in accordance with my true essence. In other words, we have to demonstrate why the “law” governing my agency, to which Fichte refers as “the unbreakable maxim of all of its willing,”<sup>57</sup> can be “none other than *the concept of absolute self-sufficiency*.”<sup>58</sup>

Fichte’s examination of the concept of “*autonomy* or self-legislation” proceeds in three stages. Autonomy is, in the first place, the condition in which the “intellect” “freely subjects itself” to the law.<sup>59</sup> This, however, does not mean that the agent is autonomous so long as the law of his action is freely adopted, regardless of its content. Constraints apply to this content as well: “as concerns the content of the law, nothing more is required other than absolute self-sufficiency, absolute indeterminability by anything other than the I. The material determination of the will according to the law is thus taken solely from ourselves, and all *heteronomy*, that is, any borrowing of the grounds for determining the will from anything outside of us, is an outright violation of the law.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, my true essence as self-sufficiency places constraint on the content of the law I can legitimately legislate. But on what ground?

Fichte proposes an answer in the third stage of his examination of the concept of autonomy:

[Third and] finally, the whole concept of our necessary subjugation to the law arises solely through the absolutely free reflection of the I upon itself in its own true essence, its self-sufficiency. As has been shown, the thought that we have derived is not one that

<sup>56</sup> The idea that freedom itself should be the constraining principle of genuinely free or autonomous choices has antecedents in Kant, particularly the *Lectures on Ethics* (see LE 116–28). This idea is developed by Paul Guyer in *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), who argues that for Kant moral laws are valid insofar as they enable us to realize the value of freedom. This raises some questions about what preserving and fostering freedom actually require. Although Kant himself evokes the examples of intoxication and suicide as instances of choices that are immoral precisely because they undermine or destroy free agency, he leaves it unclear what we are to make of requirements that are clearly moral and yet involve the agent’s self-sacrifice.

<sup>57</sup> Fichte, SE §3, 58.

<sup>58</sup> Fichte, SE §3, 61.

<sup>59</sup> Fichte, SE §3, 58.

<sup>60</sup> Fichte, SE §3, 58.

imposes itself unconditionally, which would be utterly incomprehensible and would abolish the concept of an intellect; nor does this thought impose itself by means of a feeling or anything similar; instead, it is a condition for thinking freely, the necessary *way* one must think if one is to think freely. It is therefore the I itself that brings itself into this entire relationship of lawfulness, and reason is, in every respect, its own law.<sup>61</sup>

The “intellect,” in this context, presumably designates the practical intellect, the agent insofar as he deliberates about what to do. Subjugation to the law is “necessary,” Fichte argues, because it is a “condition for thinking freely,” that is to say, a condition of the very possibility of self-determination. An agent cannot freely decide what to do, in other words, without placing his deliberation and his will under the law, the content of which is determined by the concept of “absolute self-sufficiency.”

To grasp the idea behind this argument, it is useful to return briefly to Fichte’s conception of the will, especially in the contrast he draws with wishing or merely desiring. Willing, he observed, centrally involves a “decision” or resolve.<sup>62</sup> Now, in resolving to do something, I undertake a kind of obligation; I give a command to myself. Thus, when I resolve to work on my paper tomorrow, I give myself an obligation, to which I am to conform my “objectivity.” There is no question of the authority of that law since I gave it to myself. And there is nothing to the authority of that law besides the fact that I gave it to myself. If it were imposed from the outside (for example, by another will, or by a “natural drive”), its normative authority would be in question. The only laws that are unconditionally binding on me are those that proceed from my free willing.

But this view seems to run directly into the problem of arbitrariness: any norm of action, including immoral ones, would be justified by the sole fact that I willed it. Fichte averts this problem in the third stage of his examination of the concept of autonomy by arguing that willing involves an at least implicit commitment to the value of agency as such and therefore to morality. Put simply, his reasoning appears to proceed as follows: Suppose I believe that the legitimacy of a law I promulgated lies entirely in the fact that I promulgated it, but I do not respect myself as a lawgiver. In this case, I will have no reason to take seriously any law I promulgated. So if I decree that I should do this and refrain from doing that, I will not have any reason to take any of it seriously: my own will is not binding on me. Insofar as I regard my decisions, whatever they are, as binding on me, therefore, I find myself committed to valuing my will, or myself as an agent. And, in its true essence, my will is “absolute self-sufficiency”: my self-sufficiency thus becomes a

<sup>61</sup> Fichte, SE §3, 58.

<sup>62</sup> See Fichte, SE §14, 150.

necessary end, which constrains the “content” of the law I may legitimately give to myself or what I may consistently will. Thus, the constraint on my will literally has its ground in that very will. I may not will any particular end that threatens, violates, or is otherwise incompatible with, my absolute self-sufficiency. The obligations I undertake when I will such ends are thereby deprived of normative authority since they conflict with my self-respect. In willing such ends, I am *directly* involved in inconsistent willing, for I undertake obligations whose very content undermines their normative authority.

We are thus able to make sense of Fichte’s claim that the “material determination of the will according to the law is thus taken solely from ourselves, and all *heteronomy*, that is, any borrowing of the grounds for determining the will from anything outside of us, is an outright violation of the law.” The “law” in accordance with which my will is to determine itself is not an obligation I undertake simply by virtue of willing it. It forms “the unbreakable maxim of all of its willing,” that is to say, a law that can constrain all of my willing since it places substantive limits on what I may will. But insofar as it has its source in my will itself, its authority still proceeds from my own willing.

The appeal of this elegantly simple constructivist argument notwithstanding, it still appears to suffer from a significant defect: it is unclear how the idea of self-legislation developed here is supposed to ground *obligations toward others*. A moral obligation has authority for me insofar as it constitutes a law I gave to myself, and only those laws that preserve and promote my agency as a lawgiver can be truly self-given. This conception of moral normativity certainly makes it appear as though an agent is under an obligation to value *his own* rational agency, but not necessarily that of others, for the only inconsistency lies in my regarding a law I gave to myself as binding on me without also valuing *myself* as the author of that law. No such inconsistency seems to afflict my failure to value the legislative agency of others. But morality is obviously, and in large part, the specification of duties I have *to others*.

To circumvent this difficulty, Fichte suggests that individual agents should be thought of as the vehicles of something like a universal, impersonal Reason, so that any obligation under which each of them is to respect this reason in himself is also an obligation to respect it in any one of its other instantiations.<sup>63</sup> The problem with this proposal is that it seems to violate the very spirit of this account of the autonomy view of normativity. By placing the source of normativity in some impersonal Reason, it appears to take it away from the individual agent,

<sup>63</sup> This appears to be Fichte’s strategy in the last part of the *Sittenlehre*, when he discusses particular duties (Kosch [forthcoming] makes a similar point). Korsgaard, who defends a similar version of the autonomy view, struggles with this problem as well (see *The Sources of Normativity*, chap. 4).

who simply finds within himself what remains for him, considered as a particular individual, an *external* authority. Although under a different guise, it is precisely this external, alienated status reason must assume in order to ground categorical imperatives that was to preoccupy Schiller.

#### SCHILLER

In his famous essay “On Grace and Dignity,” Schiller raises a concern about the “imperative form” of Kantian morality: “Was it to be avoided in this imperative form, that a precept, which man, as a creature of reason, gives unto himself, which on that account alone binds him, and on that account alone accords with his feeling of freedom, took on the semblance of an alien and positive law ... which guides a person more through *fear* than *confidence*?”<sup>64</sup> Schiller evidently worries about one of the paradoxes of self-legislation I discussed earlier – namely, that if the agent experiences as an obligation the law he gave to himself, then he must be identified with the volitions that are constrained by that law (namely, those grounded in his inclinations), which can no longer be properly regarded as a *self*-given law. The law is bound to assume “the semblance of an alien and positive law,” and the motive to comply with it must be more fear than confidence.

Schiller’s answer to this difficulty – the development and cultivation of an “inclination to duty”<sup>65</sup> – is fraught with a fundamental ambiguity. On the one hand, he appears to advocate a reconception of the *self* doing the self-legislation, which restores in it the sensuous dimension of our nature that Kant had unjustifiably excluded from it. On the other hand, he basically accepts Kant’s conception of the self as reason and of the self-legislation of reason as the source of moral normativity but then criticizes Kant for his failure to appreciate fully the *motivational implications* of this conception of normativity. I will here attempt to sort out these two lines of thought, which are so intertwined in Schiller’s writings that it is sometimes difficult to separate them.

The first version of Schiller’s proposal essentially articulates his abiding sense that the true self of human agents, the self that is supposed to be a source of norms, includes their sensuous nature: “In that she made him a reasonable sensuous creature, that is, man, nature announces to him the obligation not to divide asunder what she brought together, not even in the purest expression of his divine part to leave the sensuous part behind, and not to found the triumph of the one on the repression of the other.”<sup>66</sup> Schiller suggests here that the human self essentially comprises both reason and sensibility. It follows that acting morally

<sup>64</sup> Schiller, GD 367.

<sup>65</sup> Schiller, GD 364.

<sup>66</sup> Schiller, GD 365.

as Kant conceives of it, that is to say, acting from the sole motive of duty, insofar as it requires constraining the sensuous side of the self, cannot be genuine *self-determination*, or freedom.<sup>67</sup> True self-determination should accordingly make room for sensuous satisfaction, by allowing agents not simply to pursue their happiness within the limits set by morality,<sup>68</sup> but also to find sensuous satisfaction in the performance of their moral duty by developing, whenever possible and through an appropriate “training of the sensibility”<sup>69</sup> or “aesthetic education,” an “inclination to duty.”<sup>70</sup> True freedom is no longer merely, as it was for Kant, a matter of protecting reason against the whims of sensibility, but also a matter of safeguarding sensibility against the tyranny of reason. As Schiller once put it, freedom consists for the human agent not in “only acting, in general, in a rational manner,” but “acting rationally *within the limits of his material*.”<sup>71</sup>

This proposal, which was to exercise a considerable influence on subsequent philosophical debates about moral normativity, does not jibe well with some of Schiller’s other views. In particular, he concedes two basic Kantian claims. First, the moral law remains a law of *reason*, whose normative authority does not require taking the sensuous side of our nature into account, and Schiller’s concern is rather with the role inclinations may be allowed to play in the *motivation* of moral actions.<sup>72</sup> Second, it remains possible for the agent to identify with pure reason as his “true self” at the expense of his sensuous nature: “As it [the moral

<sup>67</sup> In *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Frederick Beiser develops this interpretation in detail: “Famously, Kant understands freedom as *moral autonomy*, which consists in independence of the will from nature, and which is achieved by acting on the laws of practical reason. Schiller, however, sees freedom as *aesthetic harmony*, as acting according to the laws of one’s whole nature, where both sensibility and rationality complement each other. True freedom arises, Schiller argues, only through the interchange between reason and sensibility, where each faculty both limits and stimulates the other. Such interchange frees the whole person from constraint, because neither faculty dominates the other” (186; see 215, 217, 220–1, 229). Beiser concedes that precisely what this aesthetic harmony amounts to remains “elusive” (190).

<sup>68</sup> See Schiller, LAE 24th Letter, 115.

<sup>69</sup> Schiller, LAE 8th Letter, 50.

<sup>70</sup> Schiller, GD 364.

<sup>71</sup> Schiller, LAE 19th Letter, 96n; my emphasis. Kant notoriously concedes to Schiller the idea that virtue, understood as “the firmly grounded disposition strictly to fulfill our duty,” requires a “cheerful” temperament, rather than one that, in being “fear-ridden and dejected,” could attest to a “hidden *hatred of the law*” (R 18–19). Kant also draws, as early as the *Groundwork*, a distinction between desires and feelings that are “pathological” and should have no part in moral motivation and those that are “practical” and, therefore, since they can be commanded and achieved through the will, may play a role in moral motivation (G 4:399). Finally, Kant also emphasizes the importance of moral pleasure or feeling in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (MM 6:378, 399–400). But Kant’s concern throughout, in contrast to Schiller’s, is not to acknowledge the claims of the sensible side of our nature but to protect our reason from its vicissitudes. This is apparent in his eventual conception of virtue as a kind of “apathy,” a condition in which “the feelings from sensible impressions lose their influence” (MM 6:408).

<sup>72</sup> Schiller, GD 364.

law] speaks only to forbid, and against the interests of his sensuous self-love, it must appear to him as something alien until he has reached the point of regarding that self-love as the alien thing, and the voice of Reason as his true self.”<sup>73</sup> In this context, the demand for the cultivation of an “inclination to duty” (or what he also calls “love”) cannot simply be justified on the ground that the self that is the source of normativity includes sensuous needs and inclinations. I want to suggest that Schiller’s insistence on substituting “love” for Kantian “respect” has its source in his concern to identify a motivational state that is appropriate to an autonomy view of moral normativity by reflecting an acknowledgment of the *self-given* character of moral norms.

According to Kant, an action is morally good only if it is motivated by “respect for the law.” We should examine carefully the nature of this motive. Performing an action because it is required by law is not morally worthy if it is not motivated by a recognition of the intrinsic normative credentials of the law. This is the case, for example, when the moral law assumes “the semblance of an alien and positive law.” A positive law is a purely coercive law, devoid of intrinsic rational credentials. Its authority lies entirely in the capacity of the power that promulgates it (such as God, or the state) to enforce compliance with it. In this case, Schiller remarks in the *Letters*, the agent regards “the concepts of right and wrong as statutes ordained by a will, not as things valid in themselves and to all eternity.... He is dealing not with a holy, but with a powerful, being.”<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, the only available motive to comply with a positive law is the fear of the consequences of disobedience, and acting out of fear is not morally worthy.

So understood, however, Schiller’s objection seems patently unfair to Kant, who is at pains to distinguish between such fear and *respect* for the law. “Respect,” Kant declares, “is properly the representation of a worth that thwarts my self-love.”<sup>75</sup> The *object* of respect is indeed a norm, a “worth” (which could not be the case if respect were a mere inclination like fear). Schiller concedes the distinction between fear and respect<sup>76</sup> but argues that even the agent who acts out of respect for the law continues to be alienated from it and therefore that respect remains inappropriate as a moral motive. It is the *attitude* toward its object characteristic of respect that troubles Schiller: it is experienced as a *constraint* (it “thwarts

<sup>73</sup> Schiller, LAE 24th Letter, 117–18.

<sup>74</sup> Schiller, LAE 24th Letter, 118.

<sup>75</sup> Kant, G 4:401. Kant himself emphasizes this point on a number of occasions, for example, when he declares that “the spirit of the law lies in the submissive disposition, and not in the merely lawful character of the act” (CPrR 5:87–8). In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, by contrast, and most likely in part because of Schiller’s influence, he shifts the emphasis on the *moral pleasure* the agent derives from the self-mastery he achieves when he controls his inclinations in acting according to self-imposed principles (see, e.g., MM 6:399).

<sup>76</sup> See Schiller, GD, 367.



self-love”). To experience the claims of reason as constraints attests to a problematic, “alienated” relation of the agent to them: Kantian respect, he observes, still involves a “feeling of distance of the empirical will from the pure one” and so might still point to a “discord between the needs of nature and the requirements of the law.”<sup>77</sup> This is problematic insofar as it indicates that the agent is still somehow “identified” with his sensuous nature and not with his own rationality.<sup>78</sup> But why is such alienation a problem, if the agent is nevertheless motivated by the requirements of his rational nature?

Acting out of respect for the law is essentially acting in a way that reflects an appreciation of its intrinsic normative credentials. On Kant’s view, the normative credentials of a law lie in the fact that it is self-given, that it is the product of an act of self-legislation. Accordingly, proper moral motivation should somehow include an appreciation of the fact that the law I obey is one I gave to myself. In fostering the sense that the moral law is “alien,” respect precisely fails to express adequately such an appreciation, and the law that is its object must therefore appear devoid of intrinsic normative authority – it must assume the guise of a “positive” law.<sup>79</sup>

To overcome this alienation, Schiller advocates substituting the motive of *love* for the motive of respect. He characterizes the distinction between the two attitudes in the following terms: “One may say of respect, that it *bows down before* its object; of love, that it *inclines toward* its own.”<sup>80</sup> It is a matter, in other words, of making the claims of reason *attractive* rather than *constraining* or of altering their position in the agent’s psychological economy: “In proportion as it [i.e., aesthetic education] deprives the laws of reason of their moral compulsion, it will reconcile them with the interest of the senses.”<sup>81</sup> Schiller concedes that making the moral law the object of love, instead of respect, cannot eliminate *all* conflict between reason and inclinations.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the love of justice, for example, may

<sup>77</sup> Schiller, GD, 381, n. 13.

<sup>78</sup> See Schiller, LAE 25th Letter, 119.

<sup>79</sup> Beiser proposes to resolve the problem in Schiller’s views I am discussing here by suggesting that Schiller’s “grace” “describes not *why* someone does something, but *how* they do it, that is, whether they do it gladly or reluctantly,” and claiming that this implies that the role allowed to sensuous inclinations concerns not the motivation but only the “manner or style of action” (*Schiller as Philosopher*, 177). I am not certain that Schiller actually intends to draw this implication (which is in any event not inevitable), particularly considering that if inclinations only affect the manner of the action, it is hard to see why he would object to its being done solely from respect for the law. I should also note that the objection, that moral motivation should involve the kind of acknowledgment that the law is self-given that Schiller hopes to find in love, has greater compelling force against a *constructivist* interpretation of Kant’s autonomy view than against a *realist* interpretation of it. Love seems more appropriate in response to a norm that results from my own willing than it does in response to a norm that is independent of it.

<sup>80</sup> Schiller, GD, 381.

<sup>81</sup> Schiller, LAE 14th Letter, 75.

<sup>82</sup> Schiller, GD, 370–1; cf. 374.

well still conflict with other inclinations of the agent. But this substitution alters the nature of this conflict. Whereas the agent whose motive is respect may well begrudge the normative priority of moral claims, even as he acknowledges them, the agent whose motive is love will not, when such a conflict arises, begrudge the normative priority of morality but rather now experience his recalcitrant conflicting inclinations themselves as nagging nuisances. Conflict may persist, but the psychological valence of the terms in opposition is now reversed: the voice of reason is now his “true self,” while his sensuous inclinations are “the alien thing.”<sup>83</sup> Love is the proper moral motive, in the final analysis, because it reflects a proper appreciation of the fact that the moral law proceeds from the agent’s own self.

Although merely sketched out by Schiller himself, both of these seminal ideas – a conception of the self that includes sensuous needs and inclinations and the claim that a morality whose basis is self-legislation requires a special motivation – were to exercise a considerable influence on subsequent philosophers, and particularly on Hegel, who developed both of them in detail.

## HEGEL

In the eyes of the young Hegel, Schiller’s notion of “an inclination to duty” remains, at best, sketchy and misleading. Moreover, it is not clear how being moved by an “inclination to duty,” rather than by respect for it, reflects a proper appreciation of the fact that it originates in the agent’s self. The young Hegel exposes the shortcomings of Schiller’s proposal and seeks to improve on it. He is nonetheless deeply impressed with Schiller’s critique of Kant. He acknowledges that moral obligation in Kant is unlike divine law insofar as it is “not the command of an external power, but reverence for duty,”<sup>84</sup> but, like Schiller, he claims that this amounts to a mere *internalization* of the power that promulgates the command and does not eliminate positivity: between those who follow the command of an external power and the Kantian moral agent, “the difference is not that the former make themselves slaves, while the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves, while the latter carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave. For the particular – impulses, inclinations, pathological love, sensuous experience, or whatever else it is called – the universal is necessarily and always something alien and objective.”<sup>85</sup> In other words, the mere internalization of positive commands does not make them any less positive and so does not overcome the agent’s alienation from them: it only brings the alienation

<sup>83</sup> Schiller, LAE 24th Letter, 117–18.

<sup>84</sup> Hegel, SC 210.

<sup>85</sup> Hegel, SC, 211.

entirely *within* the agent, whose nature remains divided between the claims of reason and the appeal of inclinations.

Hegel also agrees with Schiller that love is supposed to overcome this division: "The opposition of duty and inclination has found its unification in the modifications of love."<sup>86</sup> But he rejects Schiller's conception of love as an "inclination to duty" (which he calls "*liking* to do all duties") on the ground that it fails to overcome alienation. The concept of an "inclination to duty" can be understood in two distinct ways, and Hegel objects to each of them.<sup>87</sup> On the one hand, it might designate an inclination to perform a dutiful action *that depends on the fact that it is required by duty*. Hegel simply objects that "such an 'ideal,' in which duties are represented as willingly done, is self-contradictory, since duties require an opposition, and an action that we like to do requires none."<sup>88</sup> The point seems to be that so long as norms are seen as constraining (as "duties"), they can obviously not be objects of inclination, and if they are objects of inclination, it must be a morally suspicious inclination, such as the inclination to think well of oneself, or moral "Phariseism."<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, the "inclination to duty" might be an inclination to perform a dutiful action *that is independent of the fact that it is required by duty*: the agent has inclinations for actions that happen to "correspond" with those required by the moral law. Hegel rejects this idea of a "correspondence of inclination with law" "because it implies that law and inclination are still particulars, still opposites.... The things in correspondence with one another would on this view be different, their correspondence would be only fortuitous, only the unity of strangers, a unity in thought only."<sup>90</sup> The problem here is that this "correspondence" of duty and inclination entirely fails to overcome the agent's alienation from the law. The fact that an agent happens to be inclined to perform an action he also recognizes to be morally required does not alter his relation to this requirement. It remains alienated, a constraint on his inclinations, and the alignment of his inclinations with his duty is "only fortuitous, only the unity of strangers." It is precisely the agent's relation to moral norms that requires alteration.

If he rejects the particular manner in which Schiller proposes to define love, Hegel nonetheless embraces the spirit of his proposal. Thus, he opposes to the "alien" or "legalistic" character of Kant's moral law the "spirit" of love he takes Jesus to have opposed to Old Testament Jewish law. Love radically alters the agent's relation to the moral law: "This spirit of Jesus, a spirit raised above morality, is visible, directly attacking laws, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is an

<sup>86</sup> Hegel, SC, 225.

<sup>87</sup> In what follows, I borrow a useful distinction from Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 180ff.

<sup>88</sup> Hegel, SC, 213.

<sup>89</sup> See Hegel, SC, 219–20.

<sup>90</sup> Hegel, SC, 214–15.

attempt, elaborated in numerous examples, to strip the laws of legality, of their legal form. The Sermon does not teach reverence for the laws; on the contrary, it exhibits that which fulfills the law but annuls it as law and so is something higher than obedience to law and makes law superfluous.”<sup>91</sup> Morally worthy compliance with the claims of reason is not a matter of following “objective commands,” but of answering “a human urge and so a human need,”<sup>92</sup> which has “nothing in common with the punctilious following of objective commands.”<sup>93</sup> It is to the nature of that moral “urge” that we should direct our attention.

In invoking this notion, I suggest that Hegel recognizes in the Schillerian notion of love a new kind of motivation and thus reflects a new kind of practical necessitation, which differs both from obligations (or respect for the law) and from inclinations, while in a sense it “unifies” them.<sup>94</sup> Like respect for the law, love is intrinsically responsive to rational norms, but like sensuous inclinations, it inclines, or attracts, rather than constrains. An agent who loves justice, for example, feels the “urge” to fight injustice wherever he sees it. And this urge both reflects a recognition of normative authority and bears a phenomenological resemblance to a pressing inclination.

Like Schiller, Hegel proposes to think of moral motivation in terms of a kind of “urge” because that makes it manifest that this motivation is a response to norms that have their source in the self. To the lover of justice, fighting injustice is not simply something he *ought* to do, but something he *must* do or cannot help doing. Although he feels as though he cannot help fighting injustice, the lover of justice does not experience his urge to do so as an alien compulsion that assails him, so to speak, from the outside; nor does he experience it as a command “from above” that demands his reverence. He regards it instead as a constitutive feature of his practical identity. The compulsion exercised by sensuous inclinations, the coercion of positive laws, and the urgings of love are all practical necessitations, but they are of very different kinds. The first two are not something the agent regards as within the purview of his choice because they *conflict* with or at least *stand outside* his practical identity. The urgings of love are also beyond the agent’s choice, but it is now because they shape the very point of view from which choice is possible for him in the first place. The relation the agent has to the former is one of *alienation*, whereas the relation he bears to the latter is one of *identification*: they constitute what he *is*, that in terms of which he “identifies” himself.<sup>95</sup> When he acts from them, he is expressing his very identity.

<sup>91</sup> Hegel, SC, 212.

<sup>92</sup> Hegel, SC, 206.

<sup>93</sup> Hegel, SC, 209.

<sup>94</sup> See Hegel, SC, 225.

<sup>95</sup> The preceding analysis is inspired by the provocative analysis proposed by Harry Frankfurt in “Autonomy, Necessity, and Love,” in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Although Hegel eventually confined love to the ethical life of the family, he never abandoned the important idea that motivated his youthful interest in it. This idea can be found to animate his conception of “subjective freedom,” the motivational condition of the agent who, in complying with certain norms, also recognizes these norms as self-given. We find this idea at work, for example, in his conception of the duties of the “ethical life,” which are not experienced as constraining because he “*stands in a relationship to them* as to his own substantial being.”<sup>96</sup> They are not “something *alien* to the subject. On the contrary, the subject bears *spiritual witness* to them as to *its own essence*, in which it has *self-awareness* [*Selbstgefühl*], and lives in its element which is not distinct from itself – a relation which is immediate and closer to identity than even [a relationship of] *faith* or *trust*.”<sup>97</sup>

Hegel’s best-known contribution to the autonomy view of normativity, however, lies in his sustained reflection on the conditions for achieving genuine self-determination or freedom.<sup>98</sup> Since his most developed view of the relation between freedom and morality is found in the *Philosophy of Right*, it is on this text that I shall focus. This work presents moral subjectivity as the capacity to determine oneself to act in accord with norms that derive not from external, or foreign, sources, but from the will itself. Individuals realize themselves as moral subjects only when they find the source of moral authority within themselves rather than in something external. In Hegel’s view, the moral subject’s authority to know “what right and duty are” is not only “*in itself*,” but also “*from within itself*.”<sup>99</sup> In other words, it is because the basis of duties is to be found in his own self that the subject possesses within himself the authority to determine what

University Press, 1999), 129–41. Frankfurt also likens the contrast between causal compulsions and the necessities of love to that between brute force and authoritative demands. It is worth noting that I make use of his analysis only to shed light on the *subjective* dimension of love, that is, its role and location in the motivational economy of the moral agent.

<sup>96</sup> Hegel, PR §148.

<sup>97</sup> Hegel, PR §147. I therefore somewhat disagree with Frederick Beiser when he claims, in *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), that, for Hegel, “in acting from love we do our duty *from* rather than *contrary* to inclination” and that “despite his initial enthusiasm, Hegel abandoned the ethic of love” (40–1). If I am correct, the young Hegel never conceived of love as a simple, if peculiar, inclination since he rejects the latter explicitly as an acceptable moral motive.

<sup>98</sup> As far as I know, the interpretation of Hegel’s metaethics has not yet explicitly involved a version of the debate between constructivism and realism in Kantian metaethics. In *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chap. 2, Allen Wood might appear to lean toward a form of realism when he presents Hegel’s ethical theory as an ethics of “self-actualization,” where the self is defined in terms of freedom, as might Charles Taylor in *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), chap. 3, when he describes the deployment of *Geist* in terms of (Aristotelian) “self-realization.” By contrast, in *The Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), Fred Neuhouser appears to lean toward a form of constructivism (see, e.g., 270). But I should insist that none of these interpretations explicitly attempts to stake a position in this debate.

<sup>99</sup> Hegel, PR §137R.

they are: "The will determines itself within itself; all that is right and moral rests on freedom."<sup>100</sup> The ultimate source of moral normativity is thus "the will that wills itself," or "*the free will which wills the free will.*"<sup>101</sup>

While Hegel agrees that "it is a great advance when the principle is established that freedom is the last hinge on which man turns" and that Kantian philosophy deserves the popularity it earned with "the teaching that man finds in himself an absolutely firm, unwavering center-point," he also notes that "with this last principle it has come to a standstill."<sup>102</sup> In broad outline, Hegel objects to the Kantian insistence to cut off morality from "the circumstances of the world in which man is placed,"<sup>103</sup> which include not only his sensuous needs and inclinations, as they did for Schiller, but also the social institutions in which he participates. In so doing, the Kantian view operates with an exceedingly "abstract" or "formal" conception of self-determination, which threatens its ability to be the source of moral normativity. This is the famous charge of "empty formalism," to which we must now turn.<sup>104</sup>

The precise nature of this basic objection is a matter of some controversy, since it has been taken to assume two distinct forms. In its first and better-known form, the objection is simply that Kant's universalization procedure, which is meant to define norms for a self-determining purely rational agent, is simply unable to specify determinate moral duties. More specifically, the procedure can be used to validate or invalidate both evidently immoral and evidently moral maxims. Hegel concludes that, ultimately, moral duties are not derived from the application of the procedure but must rest on prior normative commitments that are built in what he calls the "ethical life."

We might offer the following illustration for the kind of objection Hegel has in mind. Kant's universalization procedure would presumably rule out a maxim of stealing the personal property of others, on the ground that, when it is universalized, this maxim involves a kind of contradiction.<sup>105</sup> Thus, if everybody were to follow a maxim of stealing property, the resulting world would be one in which the institution of private property would essentially disappear. But then, Hegel continues, in a world in which the notion of property makes no sense, my taking from others what I want can no longer be described as theft, and the

<sup>100</sup> Hegel, LHP III, 457.

<sup>101</sup> Hegel, PR §27.

<sup>102</sup> Hegel, LHP III, 459.

<sup>103</sup> Kant, G 4:389.

<sup>104</sup> See Hegel, PR §135R.

<sup>105</sup> As Hegel apparently assumes, the contradiction that Kant's procedure is supposed to expose is what some commentators have called a "conceptual" or "logical" contradiction: a world in which everyone feels free to steal anyone else's property is inconceivable since in such a world the very concept of private property ceases to make sense. See O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 81–104.

contradiction in the maxim, which depends on its being described as taking the *property* of others, disappears. If we turn matters around and now imagine espousing a maxim of allowing individuals the exclusive use of certain goods in a world in which there is no private property, then the resulting world is one in which the institution of thoroughgoing communism (absence of private property) effectively goes out of existence. Thus, both maxims fail to be consistently universalizable. But then, the universalizability test tells us nothing definite about which maxim we should follow.<sup>106</sup>

Hence, Kant's procedure by itself yields no determinate moral guidance. To yield results in keeping with the pretheoretical moral intuitions that it professes to accommodate, the application of the procedure must implicitly appeal to a background of substantive ethical presuppositions, such as a commitment to the value of private property. In other words, the sole fact that a maxim is not universalizable does not tell us anything about what to do: for example, a world in which everybody steals is a world without property, but so what? To know that we should avoid such a world is to assume that property is a *good* thing. But this we cannot know from the application of the categorical imperative.

This Hegelian line of argument has been shown to rest on a serious misunderstanding of Kant's universalization procedure.<sup>107</sup> But the objection can assume a more general and less technical guise, according to which, as it stands, the point of view from which the moral subject is expected to deliberate is simply too "abstract" to yield moral duties that are in keeping with entrenched moral intuitions. Sheared off as they are supposed to be from their roles in what Hegel calls the "ethical life" – essentially, their social roles in the family, in civil society, and in the state – moral subjects lack a sufficiently *determinate* identity. From the moral

<sup>106</sup> See Hegel, NL 77–9; LHP III, 460–1; cf. PR §135R.

<sup>107</sup> Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 156–61, discusses these objections in some detail, essentially pointing out that Kant's test does not work in the way Hegel describes: the maxim is more detailed, and the procedure operates differently. The maxim has the following form: "To take away from others who own them the possession of certain goods in order to enjoy them myself." Universalized, this maxim leads to a world in which everyone will take away from others what they want. But presumably, this is a world in which no one will be able to *enjoy* the possession of certain goods, assuming (reasonably) that such enjoyment presupposes a certain security in their possession. On this view, Kant need not appeal to a background of substantive ethical presuppositions, but only to ends the agent already has. In "On the Relation of Pure Reason to Content: A Reply to Hegel's Critique of Formalism in Kant's Ethics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49 (1988): 59–80, Sally Sedgwick also defends Kant against this objection, but in "Metaphysics and Morality in Kant and Hegel," in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Sedgwick develops a different construal of Hegel's objection, according to which Kant operates with an implausibly stark contrast between rational will and natural inclinations, the unfortunate consequence of which is that "Kantian freedom cannot be realized without the aid of coercion" (319). This construal of the objection brings it into line with the view that the primary target of Hegel's critique of Kant's ethics is its conception of freedom.

point of view, the identity of the subject, as well as the identity he recognizes in others, is abstractly universal rather than particular, in the sense that it is the same in principle for all rational agents, as opposed to being grounded in the particular qualities of the individuals involved. There is something oddly formalistic and disembodied in taking such an abstract point of view to be the properly moral point of view. By assuming it, the subject can recognize no *moral* difference, for example, between the duties he has to a stranger and the duties he has to his own children. And, as we saw earlier, he is also unable to ground a right to private property without a surreptitious appeal to the agents' determinate standing as persons in a civil society. The conception of self-determination underlying morality proves therefore too impoverished to ground the normative authority of a whole host of distinctively *moral* requirements. This is why Hegel concludes that "morality" cannot exist "independently [*für sich*]" but must have the ethical life as its "support and foundation."<sup>108</sup>

This is not to say, as many readers have been tempted to do, that Hegel takes purely *contingent* features of the "ethical life" (existing social and cultural institutions and the value commitments built into them) to constitute the ultimate source of normativity.<sup>109</sup> This was the case of the unreflective (or "immediate") ethical life of the ancient Greeks, for example, in which the legitimacy of existing ethical norms was taken at face value.<sup>110</sup> But Hegel quite explicitly *contrasts* modern ethical life from this Greek model of unreflective "relation of identity" with certain ethical norms<sup>111</sup> when he emphasizes the importance of *conscience*, which he took the Greeks to lack, and which he defines as "the absolute entitlement of subjective self-consciousness to know *in itself* and *from itself* what right and duty are, and to recognize only what it thus knows as the good."<sup>112</sup> Social roles and commitments are legitimate sources of normativity because the "ethical life" to which they belong can, upon reflection, be found to be itself rationally acceptable. And it is rationally acceptable precisely insofar as it is shown to foster the self-determination of the agent reflecting upon it. For example, my particular role in the family is a source of legitimate obligations because the (modern) institution of the family is itself a condition of the possibility of self-determination, insofar as it provides the education [*Bildung*] through which individuals develop the self-conception and subjective capacities necessary to become self-determining moral subjects.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Hegel, PR §141A.

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, Hegel, PR §152.

<sup>110</sup> Hegel, PS §437.

<sup>111</sup> Hegel, PR §147.

<sup>112</sup> Hegel, PR §137R.

<sup>113</sup> For example, parental discipline has the effect of "raising the children out of the natural immediacy in which they originally exist to self-sufficiency and freedom of personality" (Hegel,



I announced earlier that the objection of emptiness has also been thought to take a different form. In this version of the objection, which applies to the Kantian conception of a good will,<sup>114</sup> Hegel argues that the motivational purity Kant demands of the good will effectively undermines its *agency*: “I act morally when I am *conscious* of performing only pure duty and nothing else but that; this means, in fact, when I do *not* act. But when I really act, I am conscious of an other, of a reality which is already in existence and a reality I wish to produce; I have a *specific* purpose and fulfill a *specific* duty in which there is something else than the pure duty which alone should be intended.”<sup>115</sup>

Hegel essentially maintains that the good will can remain a good will only if it does not act at all, for any action necessarily pursues some specific end or purpose, and so it must involve the agent’s interest in that end. The crucial claim here is that I cannot act without being motivated by an interest in the action that is “empirical” or “particular,”<sup>116</sup> that is to say, an essentially nonmoral interest: “It is only because the subject is in this way in even the most unselfish action, i.e. because of its interest, that there is an action at all. – Urges and inclinations are ... sometimes contrasted quite generally ... with duty for duty’s sake, with morality. But urge and passion are nothing but the life-blood of the subject, but which the subject itself is in his purpose and the execution of it.”<sup>117</sup> It is, however, quite unclear what argument Hegel has for this claim. Kant might agree, for example, that inclinations are the necessary raw materials of moral life, without which moral reflection would have nothing to reflect on, but such reflection may well issue an injunction to go against them, thus underwriting a motivation foreign to those among the agent’s interests that are rooted in his “drive and passion.” And even if the *ends* of all actions are “empirical,” it does not follow that the agent’s *interest* in them and therefore the grounds on which he finds them worth pursuing must also be empirical.

Under the obvious influence of Schiller, Hegel also suggests that even if it were possible, activity that abstracts from inclinations and the institutions and

PR §175). The condition of “natural immediacy” is one in which the will of children is simply determined by their natural needs and inclinations. Parental discipline teaches them to resist their immediate needs and inclinations and to determine their will instead in accord with an external, “objective” authority (the more powerful will of the parent). This particular skill does not suffice for the self-determination characteristic of moral subjectivity, but it is necessary for it. Hegel states the point quite generally: “*Education [Bildung]*, in its absolute determination, is therefore *liberation [Befreiung]*” (PR §187R). Neuhouser, *The Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory*, offers an illuminating account of morality’s dependence on the “ethical life.”

<sup>114</sup> This proposal is developed in Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 167–73.

<sup>115</sup> Hegel, PS, §637; cf. §630.

<sup>116</sup> See Hegel, PS §622.

<sup>117</sup> Hegel, PM §475.

commitments of the ethical life would not be an instance of *complete* self-determination.<sup>118</sup> This may be why he argues that the moral principle thought to be internal to the will is not merely a formal principle of universality but includes a substantive conception of the good, of which a systematic realization of human well-being, which includes the satisfaction of their sensuous needs and inclinations, is an essential component: “welfare is not good without *right*. Similarly, right is not the good without welfare.”<sup>119</sup> But how can this concern for well-being be regarded as a principle of *freedom*?

Hegel appears here to rely on one line of thought we found in Schiller’s concern to restore legitimacy to the claims of sensibility. By their very nature, human beings are sensuous beings, who cannot fail to care deeply about their well-being. In its indifference to their sensuous well-being, morality would leave human agents deeply divided, alienated from normative requirements that present themselves as absolute, and yet fail to take account of something that matters vitally to them. But if a morality can inspire no more than this kind of divided commitment, those who are subject to it cannot be fully self-determining in following its dictates, which would necessarily be experienced by an essential part of themselves as external or “positive” commands.

There cannot be true self-determination, in this line of thought, without an adequate understanding of the self that is supposed to do the determination. For Hegel, human agents have, by nature, sensuous needs and inclinations, and establishing what is required for the will’s self-determination must begin, not, as it does for Kant, from a purely a priori account of the nature of freedom, but rather from a consideration of what beings who, among other things, have such needs and inclinations would be able to embrace as their highest principles without alienating themselves from their sensuous nature.

In the final analysis, the conception of self-determination presupposed by morality does not suffice to ground even its normative authority because it rests upon an excessively “abstract” conception of the self doing the determination. To this abstractly conceived “moral” subject, desires and inclinations, on the inside, and the institutions and commitments of the ethical life, on the outside, remain essentially alien. It is this impoverished conception of the self that, in Hegel’s view, explains why an agent cannot determine himself to act without taking into account his inclinations and his participation in the “ethical life.”

<sup>118</sup> In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel revisits the nature of a good will but with a different twist. He now appears to suggest that nonmoral motives are necessary not because, without them, action would be impossible, but because, without them, action would not be an instance of complete self-determination, leaving out, as it does, the “natural” or “particular” dimension of his self—“its needs, inclinations, passions, opinions, fancies, etc.” (PR §123; cf. §§124–5).

<sup>119</sup> Hegel, PR §130; cf. §125.

## SCHOPENHAUER

Schopenhauer retains several fundamental ideas from Kant's analysis of morality: the moral value of an action depends on its motivation; moral motivation is essentially unegoistic; morality reflects an acknowledgment of the equality of all moral agents; the claims of morality are universally binding; finally, and most important for our purposes, the source of the normative authority of moral claims is to be found in the self: "the true moral principle," he claims, is "grounded in our very being."<sup>120</sup> But his treatment of these ideas radically departs from Kantian theory. Thus, he argues that moral motivation is unegoistic insofar as it is not simply disinterested but *altruistic*: actions are morally good if they are performed not from duty, but from "*compassion* [*Mitleid*]." He maintains, in this connection, that the ground of the equality of all moral agents is to be found, not in their rationality, but in their *susceptibility to suffering*. And he suggests that the normative authority of the claims of compassion, as well as their universality, is ultimately grounded in a metaphysical insight into the true nature of the self. In what follows, I examine each of these fundamental claims in turn.

Schopenhauer's claim that compassion is the supreme principle of morality is by no means uncontroversial. Kant had argued that the distinguishing mark of true moral worth is respect for rational agency, in oneself and in others, which manifests itself in the concern not to make an exception of oneself in the conduct of one's life. And he believed that this view provided the most adequate philosophical regimentation of our "ordinary rational knowledge about morality,"<sup>121</sup> that is to say, the best account of our pretheoretical moral intuitions. Schopenhauer objects to precisely this point: Kant's moral theory fails to do justice to some of our basic pretheoretical beliefs about morality.

For instance, Schopenhauer argues that Kant's universalization procedure fails to show that helping others in need, which for him amounts to alleviating their sufferings<sup>122</sup> and constitutes a paradigmatic moral activity, is morally required. Kant had maintained that a maxim of nonbenevolence is not consistently universalizable, for in a world in which needed help is not guaranteed, I may find myself deprived of assistance when it is required for the realization of my ends. In willing such a world, I fail to will some of the means necessary to my ends, and I

<sup>120</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §2, 48.

<sup>121</sup> Kant, G 4:393.

<sup>122</sup> Schopenhauer defines suffering in terms of frustration, the inability to get what one wants (WWR I 56, 309; I 65, 363). Since benevolence aims at realizing the ends of others, it can plausibly be construed as the alleviation of their suffering. Moreover, he also believes that well-being, be it one's own or that of others, can only be understood "negatively," as relief from suffering (see, e.g., WWR I §58, 319; BM §16 146).

am therefore guilty of practical inconsistency.<sup>123</sup> Schopenhauer objects that Kant secures the desired result by implicitly and illicitly invoking the “condition” that every rational agent might eventually need the help of others: “But if I do away with this condition and, confident perhaps of my superior mental and bodily strength, always think of myself as the *active* and never as the *passive* part, with the maxim that is to be chosen as universally valid, then, assuming there is no other foundations of morality but the Kantian, I can very well will injustice and non-benevolence as a universal maxim.”<sup>124</sup> Far from being rationally necessary, consequently, the requirement of benevolence proves to be conditional upon the “mental and bodily strength” of particular agents: those who are strong enough would be dispensed from the requirement.

Schopenhauer also evokes a variety of distinctively moral attitudes or reactions that cannot be adequately explained in terms of the Kantian reverence for the law but are quite naturally accommodated by a morality of compassion – for example, the moral horror we experience at the description of particularly malicious or cruel acts,<sup>125</sup> the moral difference we make between the evil of defrauding a rich man of a certain sum of money and defrauding a poor man of the same sum,<sup>126</sup> or the moral discomfort caused by the sufferings of animals, even though they are not rational agents.<sup>127</sup>

In presenting compassion as the supreme principle of morality, Schopenhauer seems bound to leave behind the autonomy view of normativity since, in all of its prior incarnations, this view was tied to a conception of the self as pure practical reason. But Schopenhauer challenges precisely this conception of the self as pure practical reason, by denying the coherence of the notion of an absolute obligation that is supposed to proceed from it: “*absolute obligation* is certainly a *contradictio in adjecto*. A commanding voice, whether coming from within or from without, cannot possibly be imagined except as threatening or promising, and then obedience to it is, of course, wise or foolish according to circumstances; yet it will always be selfish, and consequently without moral value.”<sup>128</sup> The notion of the categorical imperative, he claims, is little more than a bastardized version of the “theological morals” of the Decalogue.<sup>129</sup> In dismissing the notion of an absolute obligation so summarily, Schopenhauer is suggesting that the notion is *prima*

<sup>123</sup> For slightly different versions of this construal of the application of the procedure to benevolence, see O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 81–104, and Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 77–105.

<sup>124</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §7, 91.

<sup>125</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §19, 169–70.

<sup>126</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §19, 173.

<sup>127</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §19, 175ff.

<sup>128</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §4, 55.

<sup>129</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §5, 56.

facie suspicious enough that the burden rests squarely on Kant to demonstrate that it is not the case that “like every motive that moves the will, ... the moral stimulus or motive must indeed be *empirical*.”<sup>130</sup>

As Schopenhauer sees it, Kant fails to assume this burden. The concept of an absolute obligation (or pure practical reason) flows out of a faulty analysis of deliberative agency: “‘These deliberations about what is worth desiring in regard to our whole condition, i.e. what is ‘good and useful, rest on reason.’ (Perfectly right; would that he always spoke so rationally about reason!) ‘Reason *therefore* (!) also gives laws which are imperatives, i.e. objective laws of freedom, and which says what *ought* to happen, although possibly it never does happen!’ Thus, without further credentials, the categorical imperative leaps into the world, in order to command there with its *unconditioned ought*.”<sup>131</sup>

Schopenhauer begins by noting that according to Kant, our deliberating agency involves an ability to stand back from our immediate sensuous inclinations and to determine, from a point of view that is independent of them, what is “worth desiring” in the first place. Kant’s argument then consists in inferring from this initial observation that the deliberative point of view implies a commitment to the existence of “objective laws” or “categorical imperatives.” Schopenhauer objects that this inference is fallacious. It appears to trade on two related confusions. One concerns the sort of independence of inclinations deliberation requires. It requires that the agent’s will not be *causally determined* by his inclinations. But it does not also require that his will not be *rationally determined* by his inclinations or that he may not consider his inclinations as reasons in deciding how to act. The other confusion lies in the assumption that if one is to determine what is “worth desiring,” one can only do so from a point of view that is independent of one’s desires. Schopenhauer observes that the prudent individual, who deliberates about what is “useful,” must be able to resist the determination of his will by immediate inclinations, but he does not have to reach for unconditional principles, or Kantian “objective laws.” And while he does decide what is “worth desiring,” since prudence recommends that some desires be favored and others suppressed, he may well decide whether a given desire is worth pursuing by consulting his other desires, if we take prudence to aim at maximizing the satisfaction of his desires.

The precise nature of the Schopenhauerian “will” is a source of considerable perplexity among scholars. It is not, as in Kant, a special faculty that stands over and above an individual’s empirical inclinations; it is rather something like a fundamental drive, or a repository of drives, manifested or instantiated in these

<sup>130</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §6, 75; cf. WWR I §65, 360.

<sup>131</sup> Schopenhauer, WWR I, *Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy*, 523.

inclinations. The intellect, including reason, is, for Schopenhauer, merely an “instrument” of the will,<sup>132</sup> and the will appears left alone to define the identity of agents. Schopenhauer continues to subscribe to the idea that the normative authority of all practical claims, including moral obligations, is ultimately rooted in the will of the agent, but it is now defined in terms of his “empirical” inclinations:

We will now trace the meaning of the concept *good*; this can be done with very little trouble. This concept is essentially relative and denotes the *fitness or suitableness of an object to any definite effort of the will*. Therefore, anything agreeable to the will in any one of its manifestations and fulfilling the will’s purpose is thought of through the concept *good*, however different in other respects such things may be. . . . [I]n short we call everything good that is just as we want it to be. . . . The concept of the opposite . . . is expressed by the word *bad*, more rarely and abstractly by the word *evil*, which therefore denotes everything that is not agreeable to the striving of the will in each case.<sup>133</sup>

Something is good if it satisfies the will, and bad if it thwarts it. It is important to note that Schopenhauer endorses a “negative” form of psychological hedonism, according to which the will ultimately aims at the elimination of suffering: the determinate object of any particular desire derives its appeal from the fact that its possession eliminates suffering, but it is itself devoid of intrinsic value.<sup>134</sup>

A practical claim has normative authority for me only if complying with it is in my self-interest, specifically by sparing, or allowing to eliminate, suffering in myself. Yet Schopenhauer also maintains that all actions done from self-interest rather than compassion lack moral worth, and that creates an obvious difficulty: “Morality without argumentation and reasoning . . . does not motivate. But a morality that *does* motivate can do so only by acting on self-love. Now what springs from this has no moral worth.”<sup>135</sup>

To resolve this difficulty, Schopenhauer draws a distinction between two kinds of self-interest. What may be called *empirical* self-interest is the point of view from which I see my self-interest as essentially different from that of others.<sup>136</sup> This self-interest is immoral, even when it motivates beneficent actions (for example, when I am moved to alleviate the suffering of others only because it arouses pain *in me*, as when, for example, the sight of it makes me uncomfortable). In contrast, what may be called *metaphysical* self-interest is the point of view from which the difference between my own interest and that of the other disappears. It is this metaphysical self-interest that makes compassion possible, by allowing me to be

<sup>132</sup> See Schopenhauer, WWR I §33, 176; II xxii, 280.

<sup>133</sup> Schopenhauer, WWR I §65, 360.

<sup>134</sup> Schopenhauer, WWR I §58, 319; cf. PP II §146, 287.

<sup>135</sup> Schopenhauer, WWR I §66, 367.

<sup>136</sup> Schopenhauer, WWR I §61, 332; BM §14, 134.

moved *directly* by the sufferings of the other, just as I would by my own: "This requires that I am in some way *identified with him*, in other words, that this entire *difference* between me and everyone else, which is the very basis of my egoism, is eliminated to a certain extent at least."<sup>137</sup> This identification consists simply of the agent's insight "that the distinction between himself and others ... belongs only to a deceptive phenomenon."<sup>138</sup> In themselves, so to speak, he and others are all one and the same, and this knowledge, once it is experienced fully or "intuitively," forms the basis of his compassion: "virtue must spring from the intuitive knowledge that recognizes in another's individuality the same nature as in one's own."<sup>139</sup> Schopenhauer relies here on the Kantian claim that space and time, by virtue of which objects as we know them are individuated, are subjective forms of cognition, which apply only to the phenomenal world and not to things as they are in themselves:

Accordingly, if plurality and separateness belong only to the *phenomenon*, and if it is one and the same essence that manifests itself in all living things, then that conception that abolishes the difference between ego and non-ego is not erroneous; but on the contrary, the opposite conception must be. . . . It is the former view which we found to be the basis of the phenomenon of compassion; in fact, compassion is the proper expression of that view. Accordingly, it would be the metaphysical basis of ethics and consist in *one* individual's again recognizing in *another* his own self, his own true inner nature. Thus practical wisdom, doing right and doing good, would in the end harmonize perfectly with the profoundest teaching of theoretical wisdom carried to its farthest limits.<sup>140</sup>

This line of argument runs into the frequent objection that Schopenhauer reduces compassion to a form of enlightened egoism.<sup>141</sup> One might reply that this objection fails to distinguish between the peculiar confusion that consists in *expanding* the empirical boundaries of one's individual ego and *dissolving* these boundaries altogether by ceasing to make a difference between oneself and others. Schopenhauer appears to denounce the first in the conception of compassion as a peculiar "deception of the imagination" by which "we put ourselves in the position of the sufferer, and have the idea that we are suffering *his* pains in our person."<sup>142</sup> From the empirical point of view, he insists, we continue to make a

<sup>137</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §16, 143–4.

<sup>138</sup> Schopenhauer, WWR I §66, 372.

<sup>139</sup> Schopenhauer, WWR I §66, 368.

<sup>140</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §22, 209–10.

<sup>141</sup> In *Schopenhauer* (New York: Routledge, 2005), Julian Young summarizes this objection crisply: "After all, the altruist *does* act for the sake of his own interests, the only difference between him and the egoist being that he acts for the sake of the interests of his *metaphysical* rather than his empirical self, so, we might put it, the empirical altruist turns out to be a metaphysical egoist" (183).

<sup>142</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §16, 147.

difference between ourselves and the other even when we are moved by compassion for him: “at every moment, we remain clearly conscious that *he* is the sufferer, not *we*; and it is precisely in *his* person, not in ours, that we feel the suffering ... we feel his pain as *his*, and do not imagine that it is ours.”<sup>143</sup> The metaphysical insight that in ourselves, so to speak, “we are all one and the same entity”<sup>144</sup> is supposed to make us recognize that this difference is an illusion and that, in our essential pursuit of the elimination of suffering, the spatiotemporal location of that suffering should make no practical difference.<sup>145</sup>

In grounding compassion in this metaphysical monism, Schopenhauer also manages to preserve the universal validity of morality. Since everyone ultimately wants to eliminate suffering, then the fact that everyone is essentially one with everyone else gives everyone a reason to avert or eliminate sufferings both in himself and in others. For Schopenhauer, the immorality of egoism is primarily a matter of metaphysical blindness. Egoistic self-interest is misguided, since it rests on a failure to realize that the empirical difference between self and others is an illusion. The egoist does not see that, in leaving the sufferings of others unattended, or worse still in causing them suffering, he himself, at bottom, is the victim of that suffering.<sup>146</sup>

## NIETZSCHE

The individual Nietzsche calls a “free spirit” bears the following distinctive mark: “he demands reasons, the rest demand faith.”<sup>147</sup> He specifies that the free spirit does not accept at face value those norms that are hallowed by “tradition” but wants to know about their rational credentials. And if we ask where the free spirit must seek such credentials, Nietzsche answers that he finds them in *himself*: what “liberates” the free spirit is a “will to self-determination

<sup>143</sup> Schopenhauer, BM §16, 147.

<sup>144</sup> Schopenhauer, BM 210–1; see WWR I, 372.

<sup>145</sup> In *Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Christopher Janaway suggests a different interpretation, according to which compassion does not have its source in a special metaphysical insight but is a basic inclination that belongs to the unalterable makeup of one's character (see Schopenhauer, BM §10; cf. WWR I §55, 293ff.). The preponderance of compassion in his character simply disposes the “good person” to view and respond to the sufferings around him in a different way than others, who are selfish or even malicious. According to Schopenhauer, to be moved by an inclination is to see the world in a certain way dictated by it. We have a reason to act morally, that is to say, compassionately, because by inducing the agent to “make less of a distinction than do the rest between himself and others” (BM §22, 204), compassion actually instills in him a worldview that is congruent with the truth: “Schopenhauer can thus say that compassion is a good thing not only because it tends to decrease the sum of suffering in the world, but because it embodies a truer metaphysical picture” (82).

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Schopenhauer, WWR I §65, 365.

<sup>147</sup> Nietzsche, HH I §225.



[*Selbstbestimmung*], to evaluating on one's own account [*Selbstschätzung*], this will to *free will*."<sup>148</sup> So Nietzsche appears to endorse a version of the autonomy view of normativity. But his version is fundamentally different from Kant's version of it: those who want to be "human beings ... who give themselves laws" must not follow, but rather repudiate, the "categorical imperative,"<sup>149</sup> for it amounts to nothing more than the "selfishness" that consists in experiencing "one's own judgment as a universal law,"<sup>150</sup> "a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract,"<sup>151</sup> a commendation of obsequiousness,<sup>152</sup> or simply the entrenched conditioning of what Nietzsche calls a "tradition" – "[a] higher authority which one obeys, not because it commands what is *useful* to us, but because it *commands*."<sup>153</sup> The self-legislating agent, as Nietzsche conceives of him, is therefore, in a sense, fundamentally immoral: "the free human being is immoral because in all things he is *determined* to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition."<sup>154</sup> But what are Nietzsche's grounds for claiming, in the first place, that self-legislation is incompatible with Kantian rationalism and, in the second place, that Kantian morality is at bottom nothing more than blind submission to an entrenched "tradition"?

To answer these questions, we need to consider the particular way in which Nietzsche expands on Schopenhauer's critique of Kant. He raises predictable concerns about Schopenhauer's metaphysical monism (it is the product of a false inference from the a priori character of the "principle of individuation" – the forms of space and time),<sup>155</sup> but it is his critique of Kantian rationalism Nietzsche is most interested in developing. Although Schopenhauer rejects the notion of pure (practical) reason, he curiously appears at times to retain the Kantian picture of agency that is associated with it. Thus, he continues to think of agency as something that stands over and above an individual's empirical inclinations, which remain essentially foreign or alien to it. Against the backdrop of this distinctively Kantian assumption, Schopenhauer's rejection of the idea of pure practical reason and his insistence that all motives, including moral motives, are ultimately rooted in empirical inclinations yield the idea that the agent is reduced to the passive receptacle or "battlefield" in which alien forces are at play, or the inert territory for the possession of which they struggle with each other:

<sup>148</sup> Nietzsche, HH Preface §3.

<sup>149</sup> Nietzsche, GS §335.

<sup>150</sup> Nietzsche, GS §335.

<sup>151</sup> Nietzsche, BGE §5.

<sup>152</sup> Nietzsche, BGE §187.

<sup>153</sup> Nietzsche, D §9.

<sup>154</sup> Nietzsche, D §9; cf. GS §117.

<sup>155</sup> See Nietzsche, GS §99.

The ability to deliberate ... yields in reality nothing but the very frequently distressing conflict of motives, which is dominated by indecision and has the whole soul and consciousness of man as its battlefield. This conflict makes the motives try out repeatedly, against one another, their effectiveness on the will. This puts the will in the same situation as that of the body on which different forces act in opposite directions, until finally the decidedly strongest motive drives the others from the field and determines the will. This outcome is called resolve, and it takes place with complete necessity as the result of the struggle.<sup>156</sup>

The agency of an individual – what the passage presents as his “will” – remains here conceived, very much like the Kantian conception of the will, as something distinct from his contingent empirical inclinations. As a consequence, leaving the governance of the will to these inclinations, as Schopenhauer does, is bound to look like alienation or loss of self-control, indeed, like a loss of agency. And this suggests that insofar as it is rooted in one of those inclinations, the normative authority of compassion could not really be said to lie in the fact that it proceeds from the agent himself, for these inclinations remain, as Kant would say, “alien influences.” Nietzsche’s own view of the active self-control and self-determination at work in agency challenges very precisely Schopenhauer’s continued subscription to this Kantian assumption about its nature. This challenge is clearly formulated in the following passage from a section devoted to the idea of “self-mastery”:

What is clearly the case is that in this entire procedure our intellect is only the blind instrument of *another drive* which is a *rival* of the drive whose vehemence is tormenting us: whether it be the drive to restfulness, or the fear of disgrace and other evil consequences, or love. While “we” believe we are complaining about the vehemence of a drive, at bottom it is one drive *which is complaining about another*; that is to say: for us to become aware that we are suffering from the *vehemence* of a drive presupposes the existence of another equally vehement or even more vehement drive, and that a *struggle* is in prospect in which our intellect is going to have to take sides.<sup>157</sup>

In declaring that the intellect will have to “take sides,” just after he presented it as an “instrument,” Nietzsche does not mean that it will adjudicate the struggle among the competing drives, thus acting as a substitute for Kant’s pure reason. Presumably, he only suggests that the intellect does in some sense have to determine what side to take, but not by appealing to its own independent standards. The crucial feature of this passage for our present purposes is that Nietzsche identifies the self (that to which the first-person pronoun “we” refers) with the drives themselves and with the intellect only insofar as it serves the drives.

<sup>156</sup> Schopenhauer, FW, 37.

<sup>157</sup> Nietzsche, D §109.

Thus, by claiming explicitly that the agent's self is *constituted* by his drives, Nietzsche dispels the worry that the agent is passive when these drives are contending for control of, and ultimately determine, his conduct. He explicitly denies the existence of a purely rational will understood as a separate entity over and above the drives the agent happens to have, in terms of which Kant had proposed to define the identity of agents. Far from being independent of the drives, the "will" is in reality nothing but a configuration of them.<sup>158</sup> In this connection, Nietzsche favors political analogies: "In all willing it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis, as already said, of a social structure composed of many 'souls.'"<sup>159</sup> If the self is a "social structure" or a "commonwealth" of various drives, then it is no more passive when these various drives are contending for a controlling say in its direction than a political structure involving different interests (for example, a parliament) is passive when it debates a law.<sup>160</sup>

The Kantian picture was appealing because it appeared necessary to account for a central aspect of the phenomenology of deliberation. When I deliberate, I stand back from my desires, and I decide whether to endorse or reject them. This seems to imply that *I* am something over and above those desires, and that *I* have some sort of control over them. This control is particularly apparent in those cases in which I decide to override one of my desires. But the Kantian picture is not the only way to account for this aspect of deliberation. Nietzsche offers an alternative explanation: "The will to overcome an affect is ultimately only the will of another, or several other, affects."<sup>161</sup> My deliberation may induce me to "will to overcome" the motivational pull of a particular affect. But there is no reason to suppose that my deliberation must therefore have been conducted from a point of view that is completely independent of my affects. On the contrary, I can (and for Nietzsche I do) decide to reject the motivational pressure of a given affect from the point of view of "another, or several other, affects." Deliberation, according to Nietzsche's alternative picture, is always piecemeal. When I deliberate, I consider *one particular desire* at a time, so that the point of view from which I consider it need not be independent of *all* of my desires and concerns.

<sup>158</sup> Nietzsche, WP §46.

<sup>159</sup> Nietzsche, BGE §19.

<sup>160</sup> In *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Simon Blackburn exploits this very analogy to make the same general point I am here attributing to Nietzsche: "The self is no more *passive* when our concerns are contending for a controlling say in our direction, than a parliament is passive when it debates a law. It is only on the model that debars desires and inclinations, however cautious, however prudent and refined, from any part in *constituting* the self that we seem passive in the face of them" (251).

<sup>161</sup> Nietzsche, BGE §117.

To be sure, the passages quoted and others besides might be taken to advocate an eliminativist account of practical rationality: what appears to us as deliberation and self-determination is in fact nothing more than the play of our drives.<sup>162</sup> However, some of Nietzsche's claims about practical reason strongly suggest he is not so much eliminating as refiguring it. Thus, in his view, the Kantian theory of practical reason is a "misunderstanding" of it, and his own rejection of that theory is not a rejection of practical reason as such, but an invitation to think of it differently: "the misunderstanding of passion and reason, as if the latter were an independent entity and not rather a system of relations between various passions and desires; and as if every passion did not possess its quantum of reason —."<sup>163</sup> Besides reiterating the denial of a Kantian conception of reason as an entity independent of "desires and passions" (as "pure"), the passage also proposes a radical revision of the normative role of those desires and passions. Every one of them possesses "its quantum of reason," and reason is overall "a system of relations between various passions and desires."

Nietzsche's account might initially seem to suffer from two major related defects: it fails to root normativity *in the self*, and it also fails as an account of *normativity*. We can now see how this is not the case. The claim that rooting normativity in existing desires and passions fails to root it in the self depends on a certain assumption about desires and passions that Nietzsche simply rejects. It is the assumption that I am essentially passive in connection with my desires and passions: I experience them as assailing me from the outside, as it were. This assumption motivates Kant's claim that when I act in accordance with my desires, I act heteronomously — that is, I allow something "alien" to determine my practical choices. By contrast, Nietzsche's characterization of self-mastery suggests that the point of view I occupy when I experience some of my desires as assailing me from the outside could well be (and for Nietzsche is) constituted by *other* desires, with which I identify.

This leads us to the second apparent defect of Nietzsche's account. It fails as an account of normativity because, in claiming that every one of our desires and passions possesses "its quantum of reason," it appears unable to draw the basic contrast between valuing something and merely desiring it. It is arguably this contrast that inspired the Kantian view that, in and of themselves, inclinations have no determinate normative significance, which they can acquire only through their ratification by an independent rational authority. Nietzsche's view, although it certainly lacks the desired detailed elaboration, at least suggests an

<sup>162</sup> For a clear version of this sort of account, see Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*. New York: Routledge, 2002), especially chap. 3.

<sup>163</sup> Nietzsche, WP §387.

alternative view. He does declare that every desire possesses *prima facie* normative weight, but he also claims that rationality is to be found ultimately in systematic “relations” among such desires. When two of my desires conflict, and I wish to establish a normative “ranking” of them, I consult my other desires and examine what relations they bear to each of these two desires. Unfortunately, Nietzsche does not specify what sorts of relations are relevant here.<sup>164</sup> But desires with better relations, so to speak, than other desires with which they conflict would have a higher normative ranking and thus would stand to them as what I ought to do against what I am “merely” inclined to do.

It should, therefore, not be surprising to find Nietzsche remark that an individual’s “morality bears decided and decisive witness to *who he is* – that is, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to one another.”<sup>165</sup> The norms or values to which an individual subscribes have authority for him because they have their source in “who he is,” which is constituted by the rank ordering of his drives. To be sure, in this passage, an individual’s “morality” is meant to be understood broadly as his system of values, and this brings us to the central implication of Nietzsche’s particular version of the autonomy view of normativity. The normative ranking of a desire is, on this view, a function of the contingent contents of the “perspective” shaped by the desires and passions, the drives, or even the “affects” the agent happens to have,<sup>166</sup> or even the “moral prejudices” or “the sum of imperious value judgments that have become part of our flesh and blood.”<sup>167</sup> This opens the possibility that those practical requirements ordinarily identified as “moral” might not have overriding authority or indeed any authority at all. Nietzsche still finds the source of normativity in the self, but this self is now conceived in terms of contingent “perspectives.” His version of autonomy is no longer grounded in a “pure” (nonperspectival) normative standpoint, which, following Schopenhauer, he finds implausible. Insofar as the

<sup>164</sup> A model of practical rationality along such lines is articulated by Stephen White in *The Unity of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), chap. 7. The type of relation relevant to the normative ranking of a desire is a relation of “reinforcement,” which requires more than mere compatibility. Two desires are mutually reinforcing when pursuing or satisfying one to some extent promotes or facilitates satisfying the other. One obvious way in which this happens is when satisfying one desire has consequences that facilitate the satisfaction of the other (for example, regular exercise will relieve stress and increase energy, thereby facilitating the pursuit of high scholarly achievement). Another way in which this happens occurs when the most consuming activities of someone in pursuit of two desires will serve both simultaneously (for example, the desire to write this article and the desire to exercise my intellectual faculties).

<sup>165</sup> Nietzsche, BGE §6. Once again, it may be tempting to read this passage as an eliminativist account of moral norms: they are nothing more than the expression of drives. However, Nietzsche’s use of the notion of an “order of rank,” which he evidently regards as a normative notion (see HH Preface §7), makes this eliminativist reading questionable.

<sup>166</sup> See Nietzsche, WP §258.

<sup>167</sup> Nietzsche, GS §380.

morality Nietzsche repudiates – the morality that issues categorical imperatives and arrogates overriding authority to itself<sup>168</sup> – presupposes such a standpoint, he may conclude that “‘autonomous’ and ‘moral’ are mutually exclusive.”<sup>169</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Nietzsche, BGE §202.

<sup>169</sup> Nietzsche, GM II §2. It is worth mentioning that alternative interpretations of Nietzsche's view on the normativity of value judgments as a kind of autonomy view closer to the Kantian view can be found in John Richardson's *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Paul Katsafanas's "Practical Reason and the Structure of Reflective Agency" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2008), both of which seek to establish the normative privilege Nietzsche accords to what he calls "power" or sometimes "freedom." Richardson argues that, in Nietzsche's view, "what matters about values is precisely that they be our own" (116) and that "choosing freely sets some constraints on the content chosen" (135). Specifically, the free choice of values, by virtue of which they "matter," requires taking this very freedom to be the most basic value, which rules out as illegitimate values that conflict with the agent's freedom. Even though he alludes to the Kantian pedigree of this idea, Richardson takes Nietzsche to have a rather different view in mind: it is because we "basically value freedom" that we are prone to discount values found not to have been freely chosen. To justify the "basic" value of freedom, however, Nietzsche would rely on a kind of internalist argument, according to which the valuation of freedom is justified for us if it is appropriately supported by (contingent) attitudes we already have. This view ends up bearing similarities to the interpretation I have presented here, although the particular internalist arguments by which Richardson would have Nietzsche establish the basic value of freedom remain sketchy. Katsafanas argues that Nietzsche justifies the normative privilege he accords to "power" by presenting it as a *constitutive aim* of the will and, therefore, an inescapable norm of all willing. While Nietzsche occasionally suggests that all willing is willing power (e.g., WP 675; GS 349), much of this interpretation's plausibility depends upon the manner in which power is understood. If it is understood as efficacious agency (as it is by Maudemarie Clark in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]), then Nietzsche's view would essentially amount to the Kantian claim that the principle of instrumental rationality, or the hypothetical imperative, derives its normative authority from the fact that efficacy is one of the two constitutive aims of action (the other, autonomy, underwrites the categorical imperative, or the moral law; see Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*). If power is understood as more than just efficacy, for example, as the process of confronting and overcoming of resistance (as it is by Reginster in *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006], and Katsafanas himself), then Nietzsche's view that power, so conceived, is a constitutive aim of action would be distinctive, but Katsafanas's argument for this view is unconvincing, for even if we grant that all activities involve some confrontation and overcoming of resistance, as Katsafanas maintains, it does not follow that this fact is a consequence of the *essence* of activity, rather than of characteristics of agents and their circumstances (e.g., the limited capacities of agents and the presence of even minor obstacles to carrying on any activity). And if the confrontation and overcoming of resistance are not essential to it, then activity cannot be said to be *aiming* at it, and power has not been shown to be a constitutive aim of action. Finally, I should note that many different views of normativity have been attributed to Nietzsche, including some forms of *realism* (e.g., John Richardson's *Nietzsche's System* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996] takes Nietzsche to suggest that the normativity of ethical claims is grounded in a human nature), and *naturalistic reductivism* (e.g., Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, suggests that, for Nietzsche, normative judgments are ultimately rooted in our likes or dislikes). More recently, in "Honest Illusion: Valuing for Nietzsche's Free Spirits," in *Nietzsche and Morality*, eds. B. Leiter and N. Sinhababu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 157–91, Nadeem Hussain has described Nietzsche as a *fictionalist* about value but has also noted that fictionalism remains silent on the question of what it is for a value judgment to have normative authority (see his "The Return of Moral Fictionalism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 [2004]: 149–87).

## FURTHER CHALLENGES FOR THE AUTONOMY VIEW

The autonomy view of moral normativity did not earn unanimous endorsement. Some of the reservations have their source in difficulties posed by the concept of self-legislation, which I mentioned in Section 1. Besides sophisticated constructivist interpretations or (according to recent scholarship in any event) robustly realist interpretations, philosophical efforts to overcome these reservations have also included modifications in the conception of the *self* of the agent making laws for himself, or in the conception of his *will*. While Kant and his immediate successors conceive of the will as pure practical reason, later philosophers acknowledge increasingly the role of inclinations and social practices in the constitution of that self, and some go so far as to argue that the identity of the self is composed through and through of such contingent factors. Whatever we think of the success of these efforts in resolving the difficulties posed by the idea of self-legislation, the claim that it forms the source of normativity faces further challenges still.

One such challenge is worth mentioning in closing: it concerns the possibility of *responsibility for moral wrongdoing*. If moral norms arise from his own self, indeed from his own volitional activity, then immorality can have its origin only outside it, and he cannot reasonably be held responsible for acting immorally. Moral evil is not a genuine or adequate expression of his self or his will, but more a kind of mistake, defect, or imperfection. It is consequently purely *negative*, only the lack or absence of the good and not some positive opposite of good.

This feature of the autonomy view troubled Kant himself, who attempted to circumvent it in the *Religion* with the idea of a free “power of choice” or “arbitrary will” [*Willkür*]. Some of his successors, among them Schelling most prominently, deemed his efforts unsuccessful. He found the two related implications of the autonomy view just mentioned – that there can no responsible moral wrongdoing and that evil is nothing but the absence of good – both unavoidable and unacceptable. Against the view that moral evil is “something purely passive, which proceeds from limitation, lack, deficiency,” Schelling observed that “already the simple reflection that it is the human being, the most perfect of all sensible creatures, who alone is capable of evil shows that its ground could in no way be found in lack or deficiency. The devil, according to the Christian view, was not the most limited creature, but rather the most unlimited. Imperfection in the general metaphysical sense is not the ordinary character of evil – for it often shows itself united with an excellence in individual powers that far more seldom accompanies the good.”<sup>170</sup> In other words, evil seems to proceed less from

<sup>170</sup> Schelling, SW VII, 368–9.

the imperfection of our capacities than from the deliberate misuse of otherwise perfect capacities.

If evil has such a positive character, then we must assume that it proceeds from human agents whose freedom consists not simply of the capacity to comply with the moral law, but also of the capacity to violate it deliberately. To make sense of this idea of how the will could deliberately violate moral norms, Schelling concluded that these norms must have their source outside the agent, for if norms proceeded from the agent's own will, it would be impossible to understand how the will could deliberately will against itself. If norms are to be found outside the agent, for example, if they proceed from some normative cosmic order, or even from God, as Schelling suggests, then it is again possible to think of evil as a deliberate rebellion against one's place in that normative order.<sup>171</sup> What Schelling leaves unclear, however, is how his rehabilitation of norms external to the self is intended to avoid the problems concerning their authority, which led Kant to advocate the autonomy view of moral normativity in the first place.

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<sup>171</sup> See Schelling, SW VII, 391. This is the view developed by Michelle Kosch in *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): "in order to be free for good and evil, human beings must find the source of the norms to which they are subject outside themselves. . . . In saying this Schelling is rejecting the available Kantian and post-Kantian accounts. Agents cannot look to their reason or to some other aspect of their intrinsic nature as a source of norms" (101). Kosch also argues in detail that Kierkegaard takes up this very issue from Schelling and advocates a similar metaethical proposal, although she leaves it unclear how either Kierkegaard or Schelling proposes to defend it against the difficulties that led Kant to embrace the autonomy view in the first place. She does recognize that this objection has compelling force only against a *constructivist* interpretation of Kant's autonomy view, according to which moral norms result from the agent's own volitional activity. Since it does not seem to have any force against a *realist* interpretation, according to which moral norms are independent of the activity of the agent's will, the objection might lend support to such a realist interpretation.



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## ETHICS AND THE SOCIAL GOOD

JOHN SKORUPSKI

The nineteenth century is often thought – with justice – to be the age of individualism. Yet it was also the great age of projects to reintegrate the individual and society. In metaphysics and methodology various schools of philosophy claimed that the thoughts and actions of individuals are constituted, or at least can only be explained, as elements of a historically evolving social whole. Meanwhile the main streams of ethics, though diverse in many other respects, advanced a social conception of human flourishing as the keystone of ethical life. Indeed the whole preoccupation with the relation between individual and social life was at root ethical – grounded in a reaction against what was widely regarded as the shallow and one-sided individualism and rationalism of the Enlightenment.

Not all moral philosophers of the century shared this preoccupation; one thinks of nonconforming figures as diverse as Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, or Spencer. Existentialism has roots in the ethically fertile soil of the nineteenth century, as does libertarianism. However, in the present chapter we are concerned with those who did. They can be seen as falling into four broad traditions: German, especially Hegelian, idealism; Marxism (which in some ways continued it); utilitarianism; and positivism. All four of these traditions, in their various ways, take it that the social good is something of fundamental ethical importance,<sup>1</sup> and all are concerned with the social dimensions of individuals' good.

Their development can be thought of in two rough phases with an intervening pivotal period occupied by Mill (1806–73) and Marx (1818–83). Important figures in the earlier phase – the first thirty years or so of the century – are Fichte (1762–1814) and Hegel (1770–1831) in Germany, Saint-Simon (1768–1825) and Comte (1798–1857) in France, Bentham (1748–1832) and Coleridge (1772–1834) in England. In the later phase – the last thirty years or so of the century – the

<sup>1</sup> But it is worth noting that they did not use this *term* much, using instead such terms as fitted into their philosophical framework: “the good of all,” “universal welfare,” “general happiness,” “the common good,” etc.

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development of all these traditions becomes complex, involving a large cast of philosophical and political thinkers and new problems.

The earlier phase was mainly concerned to respond to the individualism and secular rationalism of Enlightenment thought and to take stock of the 'bourgeois' freedoms fought for in the French Revolution. In the later phase this stock taking had been, at least for the moment, completed; the various estimates of liberal-bourgeois democracy that had now become established would cast long shadows into the next century. Two great problems became ever more pressing. On the one hand, there was the problem of finding personal spiritual meaning in a world in which traditional religion seemed to have reached its final crisis; on the other, there was the challenge of bringing the hitherto politically excluded working masses into full personality and citizenship in the coming, and, as many expected, socialist, democracy. Devoting oneself to the latter could be a solution to the former, as seen most clearly in the thought of Green (1836–82).

Our outline of these developments will take the following form. In the section "Individual and Social Good" we deal with some conceptual issues about individual and social good. The next two sections sketch the turbulent period of the early nineteenth century, while "The Middle Years" turns to the thought of Mill and Marx. The following section moves to the last period of the century but is quite selective in its treatment. It considers the later development of 'German' idealist ethics in Britain, notably in the work of Green, and the advances achieved in understanding some basic ethical issues in the work of Sidgwick (1838–1900), not least through his engagement with Green. No treatment of utilitarianism and idealism in the nineteenth century could be complete without these two. The final section proposes some concluding reflections.

## INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL GOOD

How are the good of individual and society related? There is, on the face of it, the varying good, or interest, or well-being, of individuals, and then there is the social good or interest. Is either of these in any sense fundamental? Does one reduce in some way to the other or constitute just an aspect, moment, or outcome of the other?

A straightforward and intuitive reply is to define the social good as a positive function of the good of individuals. Any increase or decrease in the good of an individual is determinately correlated to a corresponding increase or decrease in the social good – nothing else increases or decreases the social good. Call this the *correlation thesis*. However, if we say that the social good is 'simply' or 'nothing but' a positive function of the good of individuals, that may also express a stronger claim. It may be intended to indicate that the determining or constituting

direction is from individual good to social good. This stronger claim says that changes in social good occur *in virtue of* changes in individual good, and in virtue of nothing else. Or again: a particular state of social good is nothing other than a particular distribution of individual goods. Call this thesis *constitutive individualism*.

It is most clearly the utilitarians who uphold constitutive individualism as well as the correlation thesis; on their view the social good has no existence over and above the good of individuals. Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick all took for granted that only the individual subject of experience can really be said to have a good, or an interest – talk of the good, or interest, of any kind of collective being necessarily derivative from that. Mill, in Book VI of his *System of Logic*,<sup>2</sup> which deals with the ‘logic of the moral sciences’, underpinned this view with an account of social science that was metaphysically and methodologically individualist.

One might deny constitutive individualism about the good without denying the correlation thesis. Take the relation between a system and its functioning parts. Whatever is good for the system is good for the functioning of one or more of its parts, and vice versa. In this case, however, the good of the parts is thought of functionally, purely in terms of the effectiveness of their contribution to the good of the system – what they are good *for*. Thus the correlation thesis holds, but constitutive individualism does not apply. Instead a constitutive holism prevails – the goodness of a part and what is good for it (keeping it well oiled, for example) is determined by the effectiveness of its contribution to the system. In this way one might think of the good of some supraindividual whole – society, the state, the nation, or whatever – as primary and the good of individuals as secondary – their good being thought of in a functional way, as measured by the effectiveness of their contribution to the whole. This holistic functionalism about individuals’ good is closest to being literal in the late thought of Comte, when he classifies various social classes as organs of the ‘*Grand Être*’ that is humanity: philosophers as organs of reason, women as organs of deep feeling, proletarians as organs of energy.

However, it is not the only model of a holistic conception of social good. For Hegelian idealists, and even in some degree for Marx, the picture is not simply that of a whole with functioning parts, but rather that of a collectively realized, historical subject – *Geist*, or in Marx’s case, humanity. It is a subject in the sense that it determines itself in pursuit of its own good. (On the whole, it seems that Comte does not think of his ‘*Grand Être*’ as a self-determining subject, though his name for it, together with the fact that he describes it as “the prime mover of

<sup>2</sup> In *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963–91) [hereafter Mill, CW].

each individual or collective existence”<sup>3</sup> and makes it the object of worship in his Religion of Humanity, invites that picture.) However, even if Hegel and Marx invoke with more or less literalness the idea of a collective subject’s determining itself in history, they also hold that there is a good for every individual also, from that individual’s point of view – and not just some greater thing for which the individual is good. The question is then how to conceive the self-determination and good of the collective subject, on the one hand, and its relation to the self-determination and good of individual subjects, on the other.

Does the collective subject act to realize some value that is supraindividual, in the sense that this value consists in something other than the good for or of individual subjects – say, the realization of *Geist*, or of humanity’s collective essence? This view abandons the correlation thesis, unless we combine it with a merely functional model of the good of individuals. Hegel, however, as just noted, takes it that individuals have an independent good of their own, an interest in their own right, that interest being the realization of their essence as free beings. Yet he also takes it that there is a self-determining social whole, which possesses the systematic inner structure that characterizes a self-conscious being or spirit, whose interest is the realization of its freedom. In order to progress toward its own end, it must realize the spiritual essence of its constituent individuals, which means that their freedom is functional to its freedom.<sup>4</sup> But it seems that Hegel thinks their freedom is also valuable in its own right. If so, he must reject the correlation thesis.

There is also an idealist direction that does not deny the correlation thesis. It accepts that all good is experienced or realized only in individual subjects. Individuals are the locus of the realization of good. As Green put it:

There can be nothing in a nation however exalted its mission, or in a society however perfectly organised, which is not in the persons composing the nation or the society. Our ultimate standard of worth is an ideal of *personal* worth. All other values are relative to value for, of, or in a person. To speak of any progress or improvement or development of a nation or society or mankind, except as relative to some greater worth of persons, is to use words without meaning.<sup>5</sup>

Here Green explicitly endorses constitutive individualism, but that is not quite the full story, for he did not think of individuals as *simply* distinct, separate. He thought of their relationship in the terms of speculative logic: there is difference between

<sup>3</sup> Auguste Comte, *Catéchisme Positiviste* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), 69 (“moteur immédiat de chaque existence individuelle ou collective”).

<sup>4</sup> In this account of Hegel I follow Frederick Neuhouser, *The Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> *Prolegomena to Ethics*, §184, in *Collected Works of Thomas Hill Green*, ed. Peter P. Nicholson (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997), vol. 4 [hereafter Green, CW].

particular individuals, but there is also identity, a common, self-differentiating spirit. Their good is thus a common good. So his constitutive thesis, one might say, was not directional but dialectical: individual and social good are aspects or moments of a single, unitary thing. Correspondingly, perhaps, Green is more clearly, less ambivalently, a liberal than is Hegel.

The correlation thesis could also be denied by denying that there is a social good at all. In introducing the notion of a social good we introduce the idea of something that should be aimed at (at least among other things), by some or all self-determining subjects. But that there is any such aim is what libertarians and ethical egoists might deny. A purely egoistic view, for example, would say that there is no such thing as the good *tout court*; there is only the good relative to this or that individual. Note, however, that while this view enables one to deny that there is a social good, it does not force one to do so. Green's philosophy illustrates the point. His conception of practical rationality is, in a formal sense, egoistic, but for him the highest good of each individual is one and the same – common – good.

But is it not the view of common sense, or at least liberal common sense, that there is *both* a social, public good that all must, as citizens, strive for *and* a private aspect of individual good that only the individual concerned has reason to strive for? Thus one might deny the correlation thesis by saying that only some of the things that contribute to the good of individuals are contributors to social good, leaving some elements of the good of individuals to remain outside the sphere of social good. On this view an individual's private good is that individual's own concern, while the social or public good is his or her concern as a citizen. In the private sphere the individual is sovereign, but there is a public sphere that requires individuals to take up the duties of that sphere.

At the level of politics this kind of distinction is a keystone of the liberal state, and thus those thinkers among the ones we are concerned with who endorse a liberal rule of law must at that level recognize it. But that does not mean that they endorse it at the foundational level or that they reject, in an ultimate way, the correlation thesis. Mill is a case in point. He endorses an "absolute"<sup>6</sup> right of individuals to pursue their own good in their own way, so long as in doing so they do not unjustly infringe the interests of others or neglect their duties as citizens (restrictions that have of course occasioned endless debate). Nevertheless, his ethical foundation is an impartial criterion of universal well-being, so he is open in principle to any empirical case that might be made by someone who wants to limit or qualify the liberal provision of private rights or to go completely beyond them – a Comtean positivist or a Marxist, say. Of course, that does not mean that

<sup>6</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:224.

there *is* in fact any such a case. It would be a fallacy to think that the liberal state is weakened if it rests on partly empirical foundations.

Each of the four traditions we are considering had a view about how individual and social good are constituted in relation to each other. They also had a view about how individual and society are constituted in relation to each other. Positivists, idealists, and Marxists could all agree that

the 'individual' man, the man into whose essence his community with others does not enter, who does not include relation to others in his very being, is, we say, a fiction . . . the 'individual' apart from the community is an abstraction.<sup>7</sup>

English and French liberals did not agree (apart from Green: he agreed with this metaphysical or methodological thesis but still, as we noted, upheld constitutive individualism in ethics). However, they could and did agree that historical and social circumstance were crucial to the formation of individual character and of individual conceptions of the good – and thus to politics.

One last question falling under the general issue of individual and society may be noted here, because of its importance in the ethical and political thought of the time. It is the question of how one discovers what is good or right. Can such knowledge be gained by purely personal reflection, by any individual, or is this in some way essentially social knowledge? Connectedly, what form should moral or spiritual authority take in modern societies? The first question is central to Hegel's ethics; the second is of great interest to, among many others, Comte and Mill. And Marxism took a negative kind of interest in this question, too, inasmuch as it analyzed morality as false consciousness.

#### THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

As was to be expected, political thought and philosophy in Europe were marked deeply and lastingly by the traumatic experience of the revolutionary years 1789 to 1815. Philosophically minded people felt a need to take stock of the gains, losses, and lessons of those years and, not least, to assess them as part of the overall legacy of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment had dreamed of a social order grounded on Reason and Freedom. How had this dream descended into the bloodbath of revolutionary terror and Bonapartist adventurism? Were the ideals themselves at fault? On the

<sup>7</sup> This is from F. H. Bradley's *Ethical Studies* (1876), 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 168, 173. He and Green were the leading British idealists at the end of the century (see §6). Comte did not believe in essences, but he agreed, in just these terms, that the individual apart from the community is an abstraction: "L'homme proprement dit n'est, au fond, qu'une pure abstraction; il n'y a de réel que l'humanité, surtout dans l'ordre intellectuel et moral." Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive* (Paris: Bachelier, 1842), 6:692.



whole, that was not what the philosophers who interest us here thought. Even those among them who were concerned to establish a modern form of order and community, and to criticize ‘empty’ concepts of freedom, had no wish to restore the ancien régime. But they differed greatly about what Reason and Freedom meant. Auguste Comte wanted to construct a rational social order that would impartially promote the good of all. It would have to regenerate the social trust and shared conviction that modern Europe had lost – his ideas about how much actual civil liberty such an order could allow were far from liberal. Reason, for him, meant the application of positive social science for the benefit of humanity. Hegel, too, thought that the revolution had been an essential, though in itself negative, step in the advance to a rational social order. For him that was an order that would actualize objective freedom. His social ethics and his suspicion of revolutionary liberalism were in some respects not so different to Comte’s. But what Comte and Hegel meant by Reason was very different.

The political catastrophes of the revolutionary quarter-century confirmed, it was generally agreed, a philosophical critique of Enlightenment thought that had developed even before they occurred. The fatal flaw lay not in the ideals of Reason and Freedom but in the reductive (rationalistic, aprioristic, emptily universalistic, individualistic, subjective, etc.) views of them that had prevailed. Connectedly and all-importantly, it lay in an unhistorical understanding of human nature and its social determination. In an influential article on Coleridge – who had been, in Britain, a main conduit of these counter-enlightenment ideas – John Stuart Mill serenely endorses this particular criticism of the *philosophes*:

They threw away the shell without preserving the kernel; and attempting to new-model society without the binding forces which held society together, met with such success as might have been anticipated.<sup>8</sup>

He was writing in a later, calmer period, from a safer haven than the Continent. But in Jena in 1806, the same message had a starker urgency. Terror, despotism by political vanguards in the name of the people, and ultimately total loss of meaning are all that can arise from an emptily universal idea of freedom that destroys those binding social forces. Its “sole work and deed” is

death, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off the head of a cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “Coleridge,” Mill, *CW* 10:138.

<sup>9</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke: Theorieerkaufgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970) [hereafter Hegel, *Werke*], 3:436 (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, §590, trans. A. V. Miller [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977]). But throughout his life he celebrated Bastille Day.

It was Hegel who would work out most persuasively the opposite conception of freedom – freedom as at-one-ness with a rational social order.

Criticism of Enlightenment thought was strongest and oldest in Germany. Then in the quarter-century of revolution Germany took the brunt of French revolutionary fervor. And Germany had Kant – a spokesman for Enlightenment ideas and thus the object of anti-enlightenment critique, yet also an inspiration for German romanticism and for the equation of Reason and Freedom that would lastingly characterize nineteenth-century German thought.

German critics of Kant and of Enlightenment ideas more generally – among them Hamann (1730–88), Herder (1744–1803), and Jacobi (1743–1819) – had opposed both mechanism about mind and society and Kantian transcendentalism about it. Kant, they thought, had only succeeded in polarizing the mind into mechanistic-natural and noumenal extranatural aspects. This polarization must be reversed. Mind and society must be seen as they are: natural but vital and organic, historically evolving wholes. National character and national values can only be understood in relation to their time; the languages of peoples, living historical and social entities, are prior to individual reason and thought. (Language has often been a favorite topic for philosophers who want to ground ethics and epistemology in the social.)

Not that criticism of the Enlightenment was peculiar to Germany. Certain aspects were specific to that nation: notably the critical response to Kant and the fervent affirmation of fideism in religion. But the organic, social-historical perspective propounded by these German thinkers is also a major theme in the thought of Saint-Simon (1768–1825) and his erstwhile secretary, Auguste Comte. Theirs is a later response, shaped not by a personal crisis of religious belief or by provincial exclusion from Enlightenment salons but by the political crisis of the revolution. Saint-Simon and Comte are not at all fideistic critics of reason; what they criticize is individualism and the glorification of reason over the sentiments. Reason for them, in good Enlightenment fashion, is positive science. But they also want to restore human wholeness: to overcome the reductive-analytic approach that divides reason from feeling and individual from society. Although they are not personally agonized by the loss of supernatural religious belief, they worry about the social loss of something the church had provided in feudal times: order founded on faith and communal love. Their search for a functional equivalent to that work of the church was a major preoccupation of the period and to some lesser extent of the rest of the century.

This analysis of the post-enlightenment and postrevolutionary ethical predicament, found both in France and Germany, naturally led to an ardent search for historical self-understanding. A certain historical conception of their own time became immensely influential among French and German thinkers of this period. It presented it as a 'critical' age in which individuals are estranged, alienated: an

age that follows a great 'organic' age that had integrated individuals into a community with a socially unifying worldview and that – they hoped – a new organic age would replace. The terms 'critical' and 'organic' are Saint-Simon's, but the basic tripartite model was widespread and greatly influential. Broadly speaking, the human spirit had gained in self-consciousness and rational criticism but lost integration and community. Equally broadly, the problem was to find a way of overcoming this alienation without losing these gains. Certainly the critical, negative stage in which they found themselves could never, they thought, be the settled condition of humankind.

Fichte, in his *Characteristics of the Present Age*,<sup>10</sup> traces five periods in the development of spiritual life. In the age of 'reasonable instinct' the nation's life is ordered in spontaneous noble forms without the application of reflective will. When this falls apart, it is replaced by an age of 'authority' in which order is maintained by the imposition of personal command. Eventually, rebellion against personal rule produces a negative age of 'empty freedom', or arbitrariness. This is the present age. Fichte next anticipates an age of 'reasonable knowledge', in which the problems of building a social order are grasped, and an age of 'reasonable art', in which the tasks of doing so have been mastered.

A similar historiography is found in Comte. Developing ideas of Saint-Simon, he propounds 'the law of three stages' in intellectual and social development. The first stage is 'theological'; in this age nature is explained through the action of gods and spirits, and the corresponding principle of social order is the military principle of personal authority, or monarchy. (Comte divides this period into stages of fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism.) The 'metaphysical' age – beginning in early modern Europe – postulates hidden forces and absolute things-in-themselves to explain the phenomena. The abstract replaces the concrete; argument replaces imagination. Reason, emancipated, dissolves theological principles and generates skepticism about the possibility of knowledge and egoism in practical life. Faith, loyalty, and love lose ground to the idea of a social contract and popular sovereignty. This, in Comte's scheme, is the transitional, critical stage to which he still belonged. The next stage, the positive age, of which Comte is the prophet (and expects eventually to be the high priest), is to be the new organic age. Science will eschew the impossible goal of understanding the absolute nature of things and assume the task of providing the simplest and most

<sup>10</sup> *Grundzügen des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, 1806; Fichte, J. G. *Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1962–), I 8:141–396. (The English translation of 1847 is one of the books from John Stuart Mill's library now held in Somerville College, Oxford. I am grateful to the college for allowing me to consult it. In his *Autobiography* Mill notes that he became acquainted with "the St. Simonian school" in 1829 and 1839 but did not at that time know this work of Fichte: Mill, CW 1:171.)

comprehensive – though never fully comprehensive – set of correlations among the phenomena. It will be positive in that it will pursue only the real, the certain, the useful, and the constructive. The steady accumulation of such knowledge will underpin social consensus. A rational order will be constructed by applying scientific knowledge of society to an impartial concern for the well-being of all.

#### COMMUNITY, INDIVIDUALITY, AND HISTORICITY IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

For Comte, the individual not society is the abstraction; correspondingly, Comte denies psychology a place as an independent science, dividing its work between biology and ‘sociology’, a term that he coined. His methodological discussions of the social sciences may constitute Comte’s most interesting philosophical contribution; in contrast, the detailed vision of positivist society and ritual that he produced in his later years has seemed to some readers to be a product of mental decline. But that vision remains of first interest for any outline of nineteenth-century ideas about the social good.

A fundamental question for sociology, Comte holds, is the basis of social authority. There must be a shared conception of the good to which individuals can be reconciled, and in which they can find personal meaning by identifying with something greater than and other than themselves. This Catholicism had understood. The decisive battle, as Comte liked to say, was now between Catholicism and positivism; Protestants and other individualists had had their day.

In the Middle Ages the church had made possible the construction of a society founded on a shared worldview and on Christian faith and love. But what could be the modern worldview and the modern form of faith and love? Who should be the modern clerisy? Who could provide spiritual leadership? In the positivist age the ‘*pouvoir spirituel*’ in society would have to be founded on science, not faith, but it must find a way to combine a scientific view of existence-as-a-whole with ‘altruism’ (another word coined by Comte). It would do this through a new religion, the Religion of Humanity, or Sociolatriy.

As in the Middle Ages, there would be a division of spiritual and temporal power. The spiritual power would be led by state-supported scientists, philosophers, doctors; women and proletarians would form its subsidiary ranks. The directing vanguard of the spiritual power, the priests of positivism, would lay down ethical codes and direct the progress of science. Bankers, capitalists, and landowners would take temporal power. There would be no representative government or popular assembly – individual rights, freedom of conscience, and popular sovereignty belonged to the critical, not the organic, age. Comte did not propose to abridge free speech by law, and he assumed that spiritual authority

would be voluntarily recognized, but he took care to design institutions that would underpin the authority of the knowledgeable, giving intellectual authority its due social influence.

The family would be recognized as the basic social unit, conceived as an ethical union, not a merely contractual agreement. Within it women would exercise spiritual power, checking egoism and developing the social impulse, but husbands would have the temporal power, and women would have no right to work for their living. The next ethical union would be that of the nation; ideally, however, altruistic feelings would be extended to the whole human race. These universal altruistic feelings would be cultivated in the Religion of Humanity, whose object, '*le Grand Être*', was constituted by the sum total of those past, present, and future human beings who have labored for the improvement of humanity.<sup>11</sup> It would have a calendar of public rites (Comte thought shared rites no less important than shared beliefs for social cohesion), rules for private devotion, a list of offenders against humanity (e.g., Emperor Julian and Napoleon) to be remembered for "well-deserved periodic flagellation."<sup>12</sup> The dignity of the individual would consist in incorporation in the *Grand Être*: through living for others, through membership of family and nation.

As well as positivism there was at this time a liberalism in France with firm roots in history and sociological theory. Its best-known exponent is Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59), but it was also represented by a number of older thinkers, notably Guizot, Constant, Royer-Collard. While they shared the prevailing view that abstract, unhistorical rationalism had been one cause of the revolutionary excesses, their conception of what the relation between individuals and society should be was very different to that of the positivists. And they had a variation on the tripartite organic–critical–organic historical story, which valued criticism much more positively than the positivists did. Europe had turned out to be, intellectually and morally, the most progressive part of the world. What had produced this progressiveness was not any innately greater talent but rather the conflict and collision that resulted from the antagonistic structure of European societies – which were unified in some important overarching ways, but always strongly in conflict in others. If that conflict of social forces and collision of ideas came to an end, so would intellectual and moral progress. What was, therefore, to be feared

<sup>11</sup> It would also include domesticated animals, which give their service to humanity. Comte "has been subjected to unworthy ridicule" for this, Mill said, but there is "nothing truer or more honourable to him in the whole body of his doctrines. The strong sense he always shows of the worth of inferior animals, and of the duties of mankind towards them, is one of the very finest elements of his character" (*Auguste Comte and Positivism*, Mill, CW 10:334). Mill was not as generous about some of the other doctrines.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Harald Höfding, *A History of Modern Philosophy* (London: Dover, 1955), 2:357.

from the emerging democratic leveling of status that these liberals foresaw was precisely that it would be *insufficiently* critical and *excessively* organic. It could become a “tyranny of the majority,” imposing stagnant and conformist mediocrity. “The ordinary breed of French revolutionaries,” said Tocqueville, understood liberty of the people as “despotism exercised in the name of the people.”<sup>13</sup> In his *Democracy in America* he famously worried that social conformism would readily combine with a certain ‘individualism’ of which he disapproved: a preoccupation with private and family life to the exclusion of public and social participation. These French liberals emphasized the importance of civic spirit for a free people, but at the same time they criticized Rousseauesque notions of liberty, insisting on the ‘liberty of the moderns’, in Constant’s phrase – that is, individual liberty within a private domain.

The vision of an organic Catholic Middle Ages greatly influenced French positivism; Lutheranism, with its accent on personal conscience, greatly influenced philosophical idealism in Germany.<sup>14</sup> Beyond that, German visions of the ideal modern society were informed by two ideals – Rousseau’s conception of the general will, and a specifically German idea of the noble, organic polis of the Greeks (two ideals, in short, that French liberals such as Constant regarded with distinct suspicion). One can see the confluence of Luther and Rousseau in Kant’s ethical thought, and the Hellenic ideal of a society of harmoniously self-developed individuals in that of Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805).

Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) and *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1796) chart the loss of the noble aesthetic and ethical unity possessed by the Greeks and the advent of diremptive modern reflectiveness, and they look forward to an age of wholeness and freedom – a wholeness that involves the development of feeling as well as reason. Wholeness, for Schiller, is freedom, and freedom is – in Schiller’s particular, serious, sense – ‘play’ (*Spiel*):

it is precisely play and play alone, which of all man’s states and conditions is the one which makes him whole . . . man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays.<sup>15</sup>

In Schiller’s view, achieving this state would require overcoming modern specialism. Specialization of human activities had been necessary for progress, yet

<sup>13</sup> *Souvenirs*, in *Oeuvres, papiers et correspondances d’Alexis de Tocqueville*, eds. J. P. Mayer et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 12:182.

<sup>14</sup> Though the Catholic-medieval vision was for similar reasons also influential among German romantics, for example, in bringing about the conversion to Catholicism of Friedrich Schlegel.

<sup>15</sup> *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, eds. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), Fifteenth letter (in *Schillers Werke: Nationalausgabe*, ed. J. Peterson [Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 2000], 20:358, 359).

individual moderns, sunk in specialized work, cannot compete with individual ancients. Had the Greeks

wished to proceed to a higher stage of development, they would, like us, have had to surrender their wholeness of being and pursue truth along separate paths ... [Nevertheless] it must be open to us to restore by means of a higher Art the totality of our nature which the arts themselves have destroyed.<sup>16</sup>

As with Comte and Fichte, the tripartite picture structures the historical narrative – in Schiller's case harmony, diremption into specialized activity, higher harmony restored, with his age placed in the diremptive stage. And Schiller's concern with the evils of specialization also finds echoes in this period – in Comte and, as we shall see, in Marx.

At first sight Kant's equation of freedom, reason, and morality, with its Lutheran notion of personal duty and the austere republicanism it inherits from Rousseau's idea of the general will, does not naturally square with Schiller's idealization of the noble wholeness and this-worldliness of the Greeks. But Schiller sought an accommodation. His reconciling formula was that Kant's notion of dutiful action captured the dignity of human beings but not their grace; in a full, balanced vision both must find their proper place. This is humane and wise. Nonetheless, there are two conceptions of individual perfectibility here that can easily diverge: the ethic of individual spontaneity and wholeness and that of individual conscience and moral struggle. Both were to be important in the history of nineteenth-century philosophical liberalism. Among those who followed in the path of Schiller were Humboldt, Mill, and Arnold.<sup>17</sup>

Fichte however decidedly belongs to the camp of individual conscience and moral struggle. His philosophy takes its starting point from the fundamental datum of free self-activity. In every such activity the self posits a distinction between itself and the world: conceiving itself, the 'I', as limited by a domain distinct from itself, the 'not-I' – a domain that offers resistance and on which it acts in a self-realizing work. This work is the work of duty, for Fichte's rigorism about conscience goes even further than Kant's. The sole imperative is "Act according to thine own conviction of duty." There is something it is my duty to do in every conceivable situation of choice; if one mistakes one's duty it is through a "darkening of moral consciousness." This seems to leave as little room for the Schillerian values of individual spontaneity, grace, and play as Comte's

<sup>16</sup> *On the Aesthetic Education*, Sixth letter (*Schillers Werke* 20:326, 328).

<sup>17</sup> Arnold's distinction in *Culture and Anarchy* between "strictness of conscience" and "spontaneity of consciousness" (*The Complete Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965], 5:176–7) parallels Schiller's distinction between dignity and grace. On Humboldt and Mill see note 37.

altruistic *vivre pour autrui*. Spiritual freedom, the realization of the indwelling pure ego, becomes the human task – in comparison with which the cultivation of particular individuality drains into insignificance. In Fichte, as later in Green (section 5), there is a striking emphasis on both the self-differentiation and yet also the self-transcendence of the individual.

Inasmuch as Fichte thinks that the final end of action is one's own complete spiritual freedom, his ethics has a formally egoistic structure. However, he combines this self-realizationist ethical standpoint with a social conception of how self-conscious human being develops, a combination that would be an important strand in the century's ethical thought. Central to this argument is the concept of recognition. Consciousness of oneself as a free rational being is possible only through recognition of another. Just as self-consciousness requires the positing of the not-I, so consciousness of oneself as free requires consciousness of another free self, distinct from oneself, that can make demands on one and on which one can make demands. Only among other human beings, recognized as human beings, does one become a human being. This is the basis for Fichte's political philosophy. Original rights (*Urrechte*) – the inviolability of the body and the right to act freely on the external world – derive from the requirement of mutual recognition and hence of mutual self-limitation. They are thus the basis for any conceivable community of free beings. It is the task of the state to safeguard the rights of human beings against each other, and to guarantee property and employment to all, since without these they cannot realize themselves. The task of the church is to teach the highest ethical order in a symbolic form accessible to all.

The greatest and most complex contributor to this already complex early nineteenth-century scene is Hegel. Many of the themes noted in this section appear in his thought. But the reconciliation of human individual, human society, and cosmos attempted in his speculative philosophy goes far beyond them, and it can be interpreted in various ways – the subsequent development of Hegelianisms, 'left' and 'right', is one of the most important chapters in the intellectual history of the century.

Hegel cannot be placed straightforwardly as either a liberal or a critic of liberalism, in that both kinds of thinking about individual and society can quarry his work. His overall conception of human societies, as historically developing organic wholes, in some important ways resembles Comte's,<sup>18</sup> and there are more detailed similarities, too, for example, about the ethical significance of the family, the social role of women, and the leading role of a public clerisy (which is in Hegel's case an estate of civil servants). But by the political standards of the time, Hegel's outlook was that of a moderate liberal. The state he envisages has a

<sup>18</sup> But see the distinction between two kinds of holism noted in the second section.



constitutional monarch and representative bicameral assembly, as unsuccessfully proposed by Prussian reformers such as Hardenberg, Stein, and Wilhelm von Humboldt.<sup>19</sup>

Critics who have interpreted Hegel's philosophy of the state as an assault on political liberalism are mistaken. Yet the issue is not simple: it remains likely that most liberals will find themselves parting company with Hegel sooner or later. The divergence is at a deeper level. Hegel challenges common liberal ways of thinking at their ethical core, by virtue of his complete rethinking of what freedom is. True, in this rethinking both the liberal doctrine of negative liberty and the Kantian/Fichtean conception of freedom as rational self-determination are retained as indispensable elements of what freedom means in the modern world, appearing, respectively, in the guise of 'abstract' and 'subjective' freedom. But taken on their own, Hegel believes, they can become not just one-sided but positively dangerous. They need to be completed through the historical attainment of objective freedom. Objective freedom is insightful at-oneness with an actually existing rational community. And Hegel thinks that such reflective reconciliation with the norms of one's community is possible only in the modern state.

The tripartite historical schema that we have noted in Saint-Simon and Comte, in Schiller and in Fichte, appears also in Hegel's view of human history, where it takes the form of a sequence from immediate unity through alienation or estrangement to differentiated unity.<sup>20</sup> Hegel's term for an established order of shared ethical norms, an ethical living-together in which individuals are at one with themselves and each other, is *Sittlichkeit*. The Greeks had *Sittlichkeit* in a noble, unreflective form. It fell into various forms of diremption, struggle, and alienation in the Roman world, the Dark Ages of Europe, and the medieval Christian world. Only with the French Revolution, despite the terror that accompanied it, does the possibility of a modern, self-conscious *Sittlichkeit* come into view. The French Revolution breaks down the barriers to the final emergence of the modern state, thus bringing "heaven down to earth"<sup>21</sup> – in the sense

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kenneth Westphal, "The Basic Content and Structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), "Conclusion."

<sup>20</sup> Metaphysically, however, there is a very big difference: in Hegel's view the same phases or moments also appear at a cosmic level as the self-realization of Absolute Spirit in the world. Thus for him the development of differentiated unity in the modern state is but a part of a total world-process. The misrepresentation, and (arguably) weakening, involved in detaching Hegel's view of history and society from its place in this total cosmic vision is a familiar problem, which can only be mentioned here.

<sup>21</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), §581; Hegel, *Werke* 3:431.

that in the ethical life of the modern state the age-old polarization between this-worldly meaninglessness and otherworldly ethical idealism can be overcome. Hegel agrees with others who share the tripartite schema: the modern social challenge and promise is to overcome estrangement and achieve reconciliation in an organic ethical order. But unlike Comte or (as we shall see) Marx, Hegel is not a dreamer about what kind of society will do that. Reconciliation can be achieved in the ethical community of the modern constitutional state.

In such states all individuals recognize each other as *persons* and *moral subjects*. As *persons*, they mutually acknowledge secure rights of person and property and freedom to pursue their own particular projects so far as they do not violate those rights. As *moral subjects* they assume a right and a capacity to see for themselves what morality requires and why. The first two parts of the *Philosophy of Right* treat of these two forms of freedom and their corresponding social relations under the titles 'Abstract Right' and 'Moralität': the freedom, respectively, of the juridically conceived person or rights-bearer, and that of the reflective moral individual with a conscience. But the longest part treats of *Sittlichkeit*, in which individuals realize themselves in successive forms of ethical community – the family, civil society, and the state.

Hegel's treatment of the contrast between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*, in both epistemological and ethical terms, is one of his profoundest and most original contributions. They, respectively, denote morality individualistically and socially lived and known. The standpoint of *Moralität*, which according to Hegel is a product of early modern Europe, takes it that all moral agents have the right and capacity to recognize *for themselves* where their moral duties lie:

This subjective or "moral" freedom is what a [modern] European especially calls freedom. In virtue of the right thereto a man must possess a personal knowledge of the distinction between good and evil in general: ethical and moral principles shall not merely lay their claim on him as external laws and precepts of authority to be obeyed, but have their assent, recognition, or even justification in his heart, sentiment, conscience, intelligence, etc.<sup>22</sup>

Yet though this standpoint is progressive inasmuch as it places morality on a foundation of moral freedom, it also produces individualistic doctrines of moral knowledge that are empty and dangerous. Any attempt to deduce a theory of duty by abstract and individualistic ethical reflection, such as Kant's attempted deduction of morality from the formal idea of a moral law, must, according to Hegel, end in emptiness.<sup>23</sup> The standpoint of *Moralität* alone cannot sustain an ethical-living-together in which individuals realize themselves objectively.

<sup>22</sup> *Encyclopaedia*, §503; Hegel, *Werke* 10:312–13.

<sup>23</sup> Or worse: Hegel thinks that "it is possible to justify any wrong or immoral conduct by this means" (*Philosophy of Right*, §135, "Remark"); Hegel, *Werke* 7:252–3.

The individual “finds his liberation in duty.” “In duty [he] liberates himself so as to attain substantial freedom.”<sup>24</sup> On this Hegel agrees with Kant and Fichte. But he thinks that something vital remains to be said in amplification of this doctrine: namely, that Duty can be lived and known by modern individuals and experienced as self-realization only through the institutions of modern *Sittlichkeit* – that is, by participating in and identifying oneself with the ethical union of the family, the rights and duties of civil society, and, supremely, the public good of the state. In all these forms – love, civil personality, and citizenship – one is ‘with oneself’, or at home, in something other than oneself (*bei sich in einem Andern*). And that is substantial or objective freedom.

The modern state realizes and protects abstract right, subjective freedom, and particular individuality; crucially, it also makes it possible to find at-one-ness with institutions whose rationality one can acknowledge.<sup>25</sup> But that is still not all. The state itself is “objective spirit,” “an absolute and unmoved end in itself.”<sup>26</sup> Hegel regards it, that is to say, as itself constituting a free, self-determining subject whose end is to realize itself freely. It is a social whole with the inner structure that characterizes a self-determining subject, or spirit: self-reproducing and differentiated into functional components that are determined by its *telos*.<sup>27</sup> So while it is true that the modern state realizes the freedom of its citizens, it does so to actualize Spirit itself: “this ultimate end possesses the ultimate right in relation to individuals, whose highest duty is to be members of the state.”<sup>28</sup>

Is it possible then to be an unequivocally Hegelian liberal? As noted in section 1, Hegel must reject not only constitutive individualism but also the correlation thesis. Notably, also, although Hegel clearly requires that the modern state should respect the rights of particular individuality, he has little to say about what this is or should be or about its free culture and development.<sup>29</sup> For him individuals are realized by their roles in the various social entities to which they belong: through their free acceptance and autonomous shaping of the duties and responsibilities that define those roles. This conception is finally at odds with what is arguably the nineteenth century’s most important contribution to the ethical ideas of liberalism – Schiller’s ideal of the harmoniously realized individual. That is an ideal

<sup>24</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §149; Hegel, *Werke* 7:298.

<sup>25</sup> *Philosophy of Right* §260; Hegel, *Werke* 7:406–7.

<sup>26</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §258; Hegel, *Werke* 7:399.

<sup>27</sup> This inner structure comprises the moments of immediate unity, difference, and mediated unity, constituted in this case by family, civil society, and state.

<sup>28</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §258; Hegel, *Werke* 7:399.

<sup>29</sup> Art, religion, and philosophy are for Hegel manifestations of Absolute Spirit, but they are not worked into a liberal vision of harmonious individual spontaneity, as in Schiller, Humboldt, or Mill. For more on Hegel’s conception of *Bildung*, see Pinkard, *Hegel*.

of living to which Hegel does not subscribe and to which he is even hostile.<sup>30</sup> Yet can that ideal, important as it is for liberal ethics, be considered *definitive* of ‘liberalism’? That is at least not obvious. The question, then, is whether there can be a liberalism that fully accepts Hegel’s ethical outlook, a very large question that cannot be settled here.

#### THE MIDDLE YEARS: MILL AND MARX

In the early nineteenth century, British intellectual life (not for the first or last time) was distanced from the Continental turmoil of ideas. Bentham remained a major element of continuity. He was a leading figure of the Enlightenment yet also survived Hegel by a few months and was influential throughout his life. His utilitarianism comprises attractively clear elements. It is individualist in the constitutive sense (section 1) and it is impartial.<sup>31</sup> It advances the pleasingly uncomplicated thesis that good consists in pleasure and the absence of pain.

These elements were accepted by Mill and Sidgwick, the next two great utilitarians – but not without difficulty. They had to place them, or interpret them, in a new world of problems and discussions that Bentham had not encountered or had simply dismissed. In Mill’s case, these were the problems of nineteenth-century ethical thought that we have already mentioned, concerning such concepts as the ends of life, the bases of moral authority and social allegiance, and the social-historical determination of human nature. Questions of this kind also interested Sidgwick, who wrote about them in essays and lectures on his contemporaries. However, Sidgwick’s lasting contribution lay elsewhere: he gave a new level of care and attention to the analysis of methods of ethics and their epistemological foundations. And of these methods, he thought, utilitarianism was only one. Thus in the work of both philosophers utilitarianism lost its hegemonic, no-nonsense Benthamite appeal but greatly gained in depth and subtlety. And utilitarianism continued to anchor Mill and Sidgwick in the Enlightenment in a way that gave them steadiness in a spiritual storm – or (depending on one’s view) left them tied in port when others ventured onto the open sea of freedom.

<sup>30</sup> For more on the contrast, and tension, between the ethic of spontaneity and that of “my station and its duties” see “Liberty’s Hollow Triumph,” in John Skorupski, *Ethical Explorations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> “Every individual in the country tells for one; no individual for more than one” (*Rationale of Judicial Evidence*, in Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* [New York: Russell & Russell, 1962], iv, 475 [Bowring, ed. (London, 1843), vii, 334]; I owe this reference to Philip Schofield). Mill credits the “dictum” to Bentham as “everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one,” in *Utilitarianism*, chap. 5, Mill, CW 10:57.

Mill received his education from some of the Enlightenment's most tough-minded analysts of human nature and society. While Hegel was setting forth, in the *Science of Logic*, the speculative method he thought appropriate to truly modern reflection, Mill was being taught by one of these analysts, his father, James Mill. At about the age of twelve (in the year in which Hegel moved to Berlin) Mill began to study syllogistic logic and the dialogues of Plato: "all this, even at that age, took such hold of me that it became part of my own mind."<sup>32</sup> He went on, still in his teens, to study political economy, jurisprudence, and analytic psychology. Mill's resilient, open intelligence and personality were quite able to stand up to all this strongly analytic training while still remaining fully and constructively open to the ideas of the new century. These would have a vitalizing influence on him. Nevertheless, what he learned in his childhood and teens was a permanent part of his thinking:

I never joined in the reaction against [the eighteenth century], but kept as firm a hold of one side of the truth as I took of the other. The fight between the nineteenth and the eighteenth century always reminded me of the battle about the shield, one side of which was white and the other black.<sup>33</sup>

He did not doubt that the new ideas must find a place within a view of the moral sciences that is fundamentally individualist; nor did he ever imagine that they detracted from the utilitarian argument his teachers had given for liberal order: free competition among risk-takers, rights of person and property entrenched by clear and secure law, and a government that represented the interests not just of some but of all. These were the indispensable modern conditions for the growth of happiness, and that was their justification.

In particular, Mill accepts the importance Bentham and others had attached to security – "Insecurity of person and property, is as much as to say, uncertainty of the connexion between all human exertions or sacrifice, and the attainment of the ends for the sake of which they are undergone."<sup>34</sup> Security, the "most indispensable of all necessities," "the very groundwork of our existence," cannot be guaranteed "unless the machinery for providing it is kept unintermittedly in active play."<sup>35</sup> Safety and wherewithal to plan one's life are the foundation of justice, or rights. The argument is not so different, in intention or effect as against content, to the Fichtean and Hegelian argument from recognition (section 3). Both take it that human beings strongly desire conditions in which they can carry out what they themselves freely plan. Clearly, though, 'mutual recognition' has

<sup>32</sup> *Autobiography*, Mill, CW 1:25.

<sup>33</sup> *Autobiography*, Mill, CW 1:171.

<sup>34</sup> *Principles of Political Economy*, Mill, CW 3:880.

<sup>35</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:251.

a more intimate tie to the importance of community than 'security' does, even though security is a good that must be socially provided. Mutual recognition gives living-in-community a constitutive role in the individual's achievement of freedom; security does not.

But Mill's thinking about human ends does not stop at the interest of security. Let security of personal life, including just and realistic attention to the relief of poverty, be established – what then? What kind of happiness should human beings seek? What are the ends of life? Famously, Mill bases his defense of personal liberty not on "abstract right, as a thing independent of utility," but on "utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being." (By "abstract right" he means here not the rights of the person that Hegel describes by that term and that Mill himself bases, as just noted, on the interest of security, but, rather, an appeal to timeless natural law or social contract.) The interests are permanent in the sense that they rest on factors that are constant throughout a human life – and in the sense that they can be fully realized only after a historical evolution of systems of social relations to the system of liberty:

Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end. Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion.<sup>36</sup>

Hegel could certainly have agreed with that. But Mill's idea of the permanent interests of a progressive being is not that of Hegel, nor that of his own Enlightenment forebears. It is that of Goethe, Humboldt, and Schiller. The progress he has in mind is progress toward harmoniously developed, spontaneous individuality:

"Pagan self-assertion" is one of the elements of human worth, as well as "Christian self-denial." There is a Greek ideal of self-development, which the Platonic and Christian ideal of self-government blends with, but does not supersede.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:224.

<sup>37</sup> *Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:226. There is evidence of influence. Mill disclaims originality and refers to various earlier thinkers in the *Autobiography* (Mill, CW 1:260; see also 171); among these he mentions Goethe and Humboldt and "a whole school of German authors" in "the early part of the present century." A passage from Wilhelm von Humboldt's *Sphere and Duties of Government* is cited as the motto for *Liberty*. I do not know of evidence that Mill read Schiller's *Letters*. However, Schiller took an interest in the publication of Humboldt's work. (It was written in 1791, published in parts in Schiller's *Thalia* and the *Berlin Monthly Review*, but published in full only posthumously, in 1852, by Wilhelm's brother Alexander. An English translation appeared in 1854, five years before the publication of *Liberty*.) And the contents of Humboldt's essay are thoroughly Schillerian: "The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole." Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Sphere and Duties of Government* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 11.

'Pagan self-assertion' must then have read, and have been intended to read, rather shockingly.<sup>38</sup> Even among political liberals, the ethic of conscience was and is closer to the heart of many, and it is this ethic (Hegel's *Moralität*) that has done much historically to protect free speech and fortify self-determining moral endeavor. However, individual spontaneity belongs to nineteenth-century liberalism in the sense that that was when some liberals began to put it forward as central to their convictions. And individual spontaneity is what is valued by the free in spirit, so that it seems fair to describe it as a distinctively liberal ideal. Mill's creative response to it, never letting it fall out of sight in any of his ethical and political thinking, is his most distinctive contribution to the Anglophone liberal tradition.

It is in this light that one should understand his criticism of Comte. He takes a remarkably respectful view of Comte's idea of a 'religion of humanity', for all the comedy he finds in its details.<sup>39</sup> Clearly he experienced the problem of spiritual meaning and thought the altruistic ideal of self-transcendence, of liberating oneself from oneself in service to others, could be a solution to it for some people. He thought it admirable where it could be found. Nonetheless, Comte is a "morality-intoxicated man."<sup>40</sup> He grossly errs in thinking that the normal road to general happiness is the self-sacrifice that would be required under the "regimen of a blockaded town." On the contrary, each person should pursue his or her development "under the rules and conditions required by the good of the rest."<sup>41</sup> That is not a second-best solution in comparison to a society in which everyone lives for everyone else. It is the ideal.

It is also illuminating to compare Mill on Bentham's utilitarianism and Hegel on Kant's theory of freedom. Mill thinks Bentham's utilitarianism raises ethics to a new level, in rather the way that Hegel thinks Kant's theory of morality as freedom does. Both are scathing, however, about the narrowness of their respective mentors' insight into the diversity and subtlety of human motives. Mill sees Bentham as an abstract, critical spirit. He was "the great subversive,

<sup>38</sup> The phrases Mill quotes are from an essay by his friend John Sterling. See F. Rosen, "J. S. Mill on Socrates, Pericles and the Fragility of Truth," *Journal of Legal History* 25 (2004): 189–90. Sidgwick agreed with Mill in practice but not in principle: "The effort to attain the Christian ideal may be a life-long painful struggle; and therefore, though I may believe this ideal when realised productive of greater happiness, yet individually (if it is not a question of life or death) my laxness would induce me to prefer a lower, more attainable Goethean ideal." In *Henry Sidgwick: A Memoir* by A. S. [Arthur Sidgwick] and E. M. S. [Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick] (London: Macmillan, 1906), 90. Cf. note 64.

<sup>39</sup> As to the latter, see Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, pt. II (Mill, CW 10).

<sup>40</sup> *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, Mill, CW 10:336.

<sup>41</sup> *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, Mill, CW 10:337. This is not, Mill insists in *On Liberty*, a doctrine of "selfish indifference": "human beings owe each other help to distinguish the better from the worse" (Mill, CW 18:276, 277).

or in the language of continental philosophers, the great critical, thinker of his age and country." Lacking imaginative historical insight into ways of life and their meaning, however, he could not learn from them. "Self-consciousness ... never was awakened in him.... Other ages and other nations were a blank to him for purposes of instruction." He dismissed the maxims of inherited morality as "vague generalities," failing to heed "that these generalities contained the whole unanalysed experience of the human race."<sup>42</sup> It all sounds rather like Hegel's critique of *Moralität*. In general, both take over and transform. Hegel accepts the basic idea of freedom as reason but transforms it into his much richer story about the various forms or aspects of freedom. Mill accepts the abstract utilitarian structure of impartial consideration for the happiness of all but transforms the notion of happiness. It is debatable in the end whether what Hegel is talking about is adequately contained in the notion of freedom, and it is likewise debatable in the end whether what Mill is talking about is adequately contained in the notion of happiness. (Even at the formal level his celebrated distinction between quality and quantity of pleasure is much more subversive of utilitarianism's good old simplicities than he admits).

Importantly, though, Mill is not among the nineteenth-century thinkers for whom self-realization consists in at-one-ness with the community.<sup>43</sup> An interest in ideas of alienation and reconciliation is notably lacking in his work. On the contrary, he shares French liberal worries about democracy. The coming dangers will be those of conformist pressure, loss of creativity and moral leadership, of individuals adrift in the crowd and of centralizing despotism:

The only despotism of which in the modern world there is real danger – the absolute rule of the head of the executive over a congregation of isolated individuals, all equals but all slaves.<sup>44</sup>

How is this to be avoided? By developing liberal institutions that command allegiance. These will include security of the person, though that might be detachable in some degree from rights of private property (Mill increasingly favored socialism but continued to fear its capacity for instituting a tyranny of society over the individual). They will include an entrenched principle of personal liberty to safeguard intellectual and moral experiment and creativity, and they will include the education in citizenship provided by a well-designed representative

<sup>42</sup> "Bentham," Mill, CW 10:79, 82, 90.

<sup>43</sup> This is not to ignore the importance he attaches to the "social feelings of mankind": *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:231ff. But note how he moves here from emphasizing the growing force of these feelings (as a "sanction" of utilitarian morality) to the idea that the motive of "service of humanity" may become "so excessive as to interfere unduly with human freedom and individuality" (Mill, CW 10:232).

<sup>44</sup> *Autobiography*, Mill, CW 1:201, in discussion of Tocqueville.



government. In short Mill accepts, from Coleridge and Comte, the importance of legitimacy and authority and understands the importance of historical continuity in achieving that. But he thinks liberal institutions can themselves become the focus of allegiance. And so long as truly liberal institutions are maintained, Mill optimistically thinks, the danger of mediocrity as well as the danger of instability can be avoided.

He always fought a battle on two fronts: against conservatives and against radical democrats. Thus, on the subject of shared customary morality, Mill mobilizes his utilitarianism against people whom he sees as mere consecrators of the status quo – yet at other times he can sound like a Hegelian conservative holist. Overall his approach to morality is not utilitarian foundationalism but immanent critique; nonetheless, he deeply fears bourgeois moralism and respectability. As for democracy, Mill is more of a democrat than most other nineteenth-century liberals; yet the test by which he judges a democratic constitution is not the “will of the people” but “the good of the people.”<sup>45</sup> Above all, his liberalism is unabashedly individualist and elitist:

No government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy, either in its political acts or in the opinions, qualities, and tone of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they always have done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few. The initiation of all wise and noble things must come from individuals; generally at first from some one individual.<sup>46</sup>

Marx’s intellectual development is in an important way exactly the opposite of Mill’s. Mill is educated in his teens to be a utilitarian democrat, legal rationalizer, and classical political economist. He then reworks these beliefs, opening up his thinking to the new historical consciousness in social theory and the new interpretative sensitivity to human longings, potentialities, and ideals. In contrast, Marx starts from a German intellectual context in which precisely these historical, ethical, and spiritual preoccupations were at the fore. While at university in his teens he studies Kant and Fichte and becomes immersed in Hegel. In his twenties he studies classical political economy and undertakes to rethink it within the speculative framework of historical materialism.

This life project made of Marx one of the great social theorists. However, our topic here is not the continuing scientific significance of historical materialism, where Marx is at his strongest, but his ethical vision of liberated human powers

<sup>45</sup> “Pledges (2),” Mill, CW 23:502.

<sup>46</sup> *Liberty*, Mill, CW: 18:269. (This brief account of Mill is expanded in John Skorupski, *Why Read Mill Today?* [London: Routledge, 2006].)

and human community, which is potent and yet fragmentary and flawed. Because Marx was not just a great social theorist but also an immensely influential revolutionary, this flawed potency would eventually have catastrophic effects.

Historical materialism claims to ‘turn Hegel right side up’: it holds that the thought-forms of a historical epoch are not the origin but rather the outcome of productive material activity by determinate human beings. The protagonist is now Humanity, not *Geist*, but as in Hegel, the vision is still that of dialectical progress toward fully free communal self-realization, by way of the overcoming of successive contradictions – which in Marx’s account take the form of successive contradictions between the forces and the relations of production.

His historical narrative retains the tripartite community-diremption-community scheme. To achieve fully free realization of their powers human beings must step forth from primitive community and pass through alienation from themselves, their work, each other, and nature. In the final outcome they achieve a higher level of at-one-ness with all of these. But first they must overcome religious alienation, and then, at the last stage of this progress, they must overcome the alienation that is generated by capitalist production. Religious alienation (as to which Marx follows Feuerbach)<sup>47</sup> involves the reifying belief in a being that supposedly exists independently of humanity, the fetishist ascription to that being of powers over humanity’s fate, and the self-estrangement involved in ascribing to something other than humanity powers that are in fact the unrecognized powers of humanity itself. Likewise, the alienation generated by capitalism reifies and fetishises commodities, estranging human beings from their own labor and its products. Atheism achieves a “theoretical” humanism; only with communism, however, does humanity achieve the “practical humanism” in which it fully appropriates its own powers.<sup>48</sup>

In a communist society human beings realize themselves by working freely for the benefit of each other. I do not work for others in the sense of entering the employment of others out of the necessity of maintaining my own existence – I have left the realm of necessity and entered the realm of free community. I now produce “in a human manner”: (1) my product now gives my individuality objective expression, rather than standing against it as something alien; (2) your use of my product gives me the enjoyment of satisfying your need and objectifies the human essence, which is that of relatedness to others; (3) I mediate between

<sup>47</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) (Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, ed. Werner Schuffenhauer [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914–]).

<sup>48</sup> 1844 *Manuscripts*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975–) [hereafter Marx, CW], 3:341; *Marx Engels Werke*, ed. Institut für Marxismus–Leninismus beim ZK der SED (Berlin: Dietz, 1961–6) [hereafter Marx, MEW], 40.1:583.

you and that essence and am thus felt by you as a completion of your essence and confirmed in your love.

In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised* my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal* nature.<sup>49</sup>

Marx's vision of a communal human essence combines Hegelian themes of self-realization through labor and at-one-ness with others with Schiller's ideal of the fully developed, whole individual.<sup>50</sup> In that Schillerism it differs both from the simplicity of Comte's '*vivre pour autrui*' and from Hegel's objective freedom. Communist society, we are told, will be "the only society in which the genuine and free development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase."<sup>51</sup>

But it also differs from Hegel's model of objective freedom by a crucial lack of realism. Hegel thinks that objective freedom retains the elements of abstract right, subjective freedom, and private scope for particular individuality. It is attained in a state that guarantees all these things. Marx thinks that communism will abolish all such contrasts between public and private life, general and particular interests. So it will abolish private property and money; crucially, it will abolish the state itself, with its institutions of representative government: for the state "is based on the contradiction between *public* and *private* life, on the contradiction between *general interests* and *private interests*."<sup>52</sup> Like Saint-Simon, Marx imagines that there can be a transition from the 'government of people to the administration of things'. He thinks that truly political, as against administrative, deliberation can simply go away.

Communism is conceived as a free self-differentiated social unity of the kind that is envisaged in a certain ideal of the family. Some division of labor remains, but it is not forced, can be varied, and is done for the benefit of others. All decisions are made communally, without mediating political institutions, and questions of just distribution fall away:

After the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after

<sup>49</sup> "On James Mill," Marx, CW 3:228 (Marx, MEW 40.1:462).

<sup>50</sup> "In a communist society . . . nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes" (*The German Ideology*, Marx, CW 5:47 [Marx, MEW 3:33]). Marx links this, as Schiller does, to the overcoming, at least to some degree, of the division of labor. Schiller talks of play where Marx talks of work – but Marx's conception of work as free self-activity (as against work as alienated labor) is pretty much Schiller's idea of play, especially in the idea of it as a freedom from natural necessity.

<sup>51</sup> *The German Ideology*, Marx, CW 5:439 (Marx, MEW 3:424).

<sup>52</sup> "Critical Notes on the Article, 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian,'" Marx, CW 3:198 (Marx, MEW 1:401).

labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!<sup>53</sup>

Since Marx thinks he can see that history progresses dialectically to this outcome, he can insist that he is not indulging in wishful thinking about how conditions would have become in some Future Perfect. He strongly agrees with Hegel that mere invocations of 'what ought to be' are worthless posturing. By the same token, since criticism can only be immanent, detailed ethical reflection on how a future communist society should work in detail is impossible as well as redundant.

But in reality it is obvious that Marx's analysis of history is strongly driven by the post-enlightenment ideals we have found in early nineteenth-century thought. He is the thinker who most fully indulges a vision that puts together all those ideals: a community in which human beings achieve complete ethical at-one-ness, while yet each fully and freely develops his or her individuality. Communism will satisfy all aspirations and abolish all tensions – and it is inevitable.

Insofar as nineteenth-century liberalism, as well as communism, subscribes to the Schillerian ideal of harmonious all-round development, both face the problem of division of labor. Modern societies rest on an extraordinary and constantly increasing degree of economic and intellectual specialization. Can the Schillerian ideal play any role in them? Can this specialization be countered? Should one try to counter it?

One can argue that modern specialization is a solidarity-producing process. Greater mutual dependence among strangers in large and complex organizations fosters a concern for a larger circle of people. One can also appeal to the achievement of abundance. Modern technology and organization suffice to reduce the necessity of specialized labor to a minimum. There is enough to satisfy the basic need of all. Perhaps what we should now do, as Mill suggested, is to enter an economically stationary state.<sup>54</sup>

But in a stationary state of abundance how should self-realization develop? One could answer, in liberal spirit, that it best develops through guaranteeing a liberty to individuals by which they can develop themselves as best they may. It will be for them to decide how much to engage in the competitive and remunerative world of specialized work, how much in the pursuit of voluntary public service; how much to devote themselves to a specialized self-realizing life-project even

<sup>53</sup> *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx, CW 24:87 (Marx, MEW 19:21).

<sup>54</sup> *Principles of Political Economy*, chap. 6, "Of the Stationary State," Mill, CW 2:752–7.

at the cost of all-round cultivation, and how much to all-round self-cultivation. What, in contrast, is the communist vision? How is specialized work allocated? How is 'from each according to his ability' implemented? Do not individuality and community pull against each other? Would there be enough room for opposition, struggle, and sacrifice, or would there be a stifling mediocrity of ideals? Marx worries about alienation, but not about populist conformism. There is an inadequately imagined, dilettantish feel to the idea that "in a communist society ... nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any sphere he wishes ... there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities."<sup>55</sup> Whatever one thinks about all that, the idea that has proved really dangerous is the notion that conflict between particular and general interests can be somehow abolished. Communism envisages a self-transparent collective subject pursuing a common good in a conflict-free, and hence justice-free, way. It is a cornerstone of any liberalism that this cannot be. Human beings are territorial and competitive as well as social animals. To develop they must have a domain in which they are sovereign, and that domain must be articulated in civil and political institutions. As Hegel saw, they must be able to articulate themselves as persons and as moral subjects, and this requires a structure of rights. Mill likewise diffracts his utilitarian conception of the good through a thoroughly worked-out theory of rights, but Marx thinks rights betray an alienation of individuals from themselves and each other.

Liberalism can acknowledge the vocation of human beings to be citizens, precisely because it does not see the political as something that can disappear. The political is not merely a matter of finding a *modus vivendi*; it is valuable in itself. In larger and smaller associations, it is the arena of social good, the arena in which we come together to forge a differentiated unity from out of our conflicts.

#### THE LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE COMMON GOOD AND THE DUALISM OF PRACTICAL REASON

The last thirty years of the nineteenth century were both seminal and transitional in many fields of thought. New ideas and methods emerged, which would bring about radical breaks in the next century; higher standards of analytic rigor were attained in philosophy as well as in other fields. Particularly relevant to our topic was a sharp new emphasis on separating out questions of logic and ethics from questions of psychological and social fact. Sidgwick's work is an outstanding example of this trend; similar trends are evident in neo-Kantianism and

<sup>55</sup> *The German Ideology*, in Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 185, 206.

Brentanian value theory. This purism forms part of an increasing professionalization of academic philosophy. Not surprisingly, thinkers of this kind tended to be less involved in the substantive moral and political issues of their time.

However, the resurgence of idealism in Britain during these years does not form part of this trend. Idealism owed its public *éclat* precisely to the fact that it helped to inspire a reforming liberal movement, which was also deeply religious in inspiration. In this sense it was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century, comparable to the other philosophical and social movements mentioned so far – utilitarianism, positivism, German idealism, and Marxism. T. H. Green was the philosophical leader of the movement, though F. H. Bradley's (1846–1924) idealist metaphysics made a greater impact in the world of academic philosophy. Bradley wrote a famous set of *Ethical Studies* that follow broadly Hegelian lines and attack individualism,<sup>56</sup> but he did not share Green's practical interests in politics and religion.<sup>57</sup>

The earlier ethical concerns we have surveyed developed in a period in which the commercial and professional bourgeoisie were to dominate politics and culture. But now philosophical thinking about politics was being shaped by the anticipated advent of socialism, or social democracy, or 'new liberalism'. How, in particular, would the incorporation of the working classes in the political community change it – and them?

For an idealist British liberal it held the potential for a historic expansion of spirit, into centers of self-legislation and objective freedom that had hitherto lain dormant. Bringing about that spiritual expansion would require moral education and state support, in part at least through legislation that by older *laissez-faire* standards seemed interventionist. This rather more favorable attitude to state intervention in such areas as factory safety, temperance, and education distinguished the new liberalism from the old, although the new liberals strongly insisted that intervention should be restricted to measures that developed autonomy ('positive freedom').<sup>58</sup> Another issue of particular importance in Britain was the philosophical crisis, as it seemed, of religion. In Green's view the tasks of regenerating religion and expanding moral citizenship were intimately linked.

<sup>56</sup> "It was Individualism, much rather than Hedonism, on which really I was making war." "A Personal Explanation," *International Journal of Ethics* 4 (1893–4): 386.

<sup>57</sup> However, the number of significant philosophers who did share both Green's philosophical idealism and his practical interests was notably large. See Peter P. Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> Green's invocation of positive freedom in defense of such legislation is to be found in his 1881 lecture to the Leicester Liberal Association (*Works of Thomas Hill Green*, ed. Richard Lewis Nettleship [London: Longmans, Green, 1885–8], 3:370–1). But he remained an economic liberal overall. See Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and His Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964).

Both must involve “the effort towards self recognition of that spiritual life which fulfils itself in many ways but most completely in the Christian religion.”<sup>59</sup>

Becoming a citizen is acquiring the capacity for self-governance and the ability and will to think impartially about the good of all. Now utilitarians and Kantians alike saw impartiality as a fundamental ethical requirement – but how they justified that view remained obscure (the obscurity was highlighted by Sidgwick, as will be seen later). Green approaches the problem from within the idealist tradition. He accepts Fichte’s self-realizationist starting point.<sup>60</sup> His ethics is thus explicitly egoistic, in the formal or philosophical sense: each individual should pursue his or her good. That good, however, if properly understood, is seen to lie in the pursuit of what Green calls ‘the common good’.

Green takes the good of a person to consist in satisfaction of that person’s desires, and he takes it that a person necessarily acts to satisfy his or her desires. Desires, however, are not merely “solicitations,” passions, impulses. They are, rather, the solicitations with which the self chooses to identify itself. The progress of the self is revealed in its choice of desires. There are always higher, more realized, and lower, less realized, states or moments of the self: the good of an individual is that which is desired in the individual’s most realized state, while sin consists in reversion to less realized states of the self. And what the most realized self desires, it turns out, is the common good, a good that is not competitive but common to all individual persons. Right action, that is, contribution to the common good, can thus be shown to be what is best for the individual person; it is also fully free action, in that to act freely is to act in accordance with the desires of one’s most realized self.

There is thus no need to posit – as an underived principle in practical reason – a principle of impartiality that says that the good of any one individual has no inherently greater reason-giving force than the good of any other. The only ultimate practical-reason-giving consideration is my own good. However, the truer my understanding, or the fuller my development, of myself and my own good, the more I grasp its identity with the common good. I achieve my true good by being and doing good.

Green’s idealist metaphysics underpins this ethics by denying the final separateness of individuals, seeing them instead as differentiated moments of a single subject. But like other idealists he can also draw on an empirical account of what developed human nature desires – an account that would be equally available, for example, to Mill. Making the best of ourselves is for most of us one of our

<sup>59</sup> *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, ed. Nettleship, 3:121. For more on the feel of this crisis of faith see Mrs. Humphry Ward’s novel *Robert Elsmere* (London, 1888), in which Green appears as Grey.

<sup>60</sup> Also the idea that self-consciousness requires mutual recognition. See Nicholson, *Political Philosophy of the British Idealists*, 56–7.

categorial ends, an aspect of our good. When a person comes to see a task, project, or way of living “as the fulfilment of himself, of that which he has in him to be,” then, says Green, “it will excite an interest in him like no other interest, different in kind from any of his desires and aversions except such as are derived from it.”<sup>61</sup> It will be experienced as a practical necessity. And that for Green is the basis of moral agency: I come to see that striving for the common good is a fulfillment of myself, and in imposing on myself the rules required for this project, irrespective of other inclinations I may at this or that time have, I am free. Instead of removing unfreedom and replacing it by mere arbitrariness, I have removed it by expanding – differentiating and actualizing – myself, finding myself in the other.

It is true, one might agree, that identification with the common good is one of the most powerful forms of self-fulfilment. But is it the only or even the highest form? It may have force to claim that the common good will be one of the things that my best, most realized, self will desire, but it is far less forceful to hold that it will be the *only* one.

What is the content of the common good? As Green defines it, “there can be no competition for its attainment between man and man.”<sup>62</sup> Now if the common good consisted in nothing other than pursuit – as against even achievement – of the good of all, impartially considered, then it would be a truly noncompetitive good. But then we must assume, on pain of incoherence, that there are personal goods other than the common good. On the other hand, since resources are scarce, any widening of the content of the common good seems to conflict with Green’s definition of it. Even if we were to hold that the good of each person consists in achieving, and not just pursuing to the best of his or her ability, the good of all, the likelihood of each person’s achievement would depend on command of scarce resources. And other goods, such as realizing one’s aesthetic, intellectual, or physical capabilities, are clearly competitive in the sense that pursuing them calls on scarce resources, as Sidgwick pointed out.<sup>63</sup>

Could Green reply that such things as scholarship or aesthetic or athletic excellence should all be seen as themselves part of the common good? To reply in this way would assume that it is not the good of the individual but the good of

<sup>61</sup> Green, CW, *Prolegomena*, §193.

<sup>62</sup> Green, CW, *Prolegomena*, §281.

<sup>63</sup> Henry Sidgwick, *The Ethics of T. H. Green, Herbert Spencer and J. Martineau* (London: Macmillan, 1902), 69–72. Green does not deny that these are goods, or at any rate that in a good society they would be. But he thinks that in the society of *his* time they must make way to a conscientious pursuit of universal enfranchisement and objective freedom. Thus he accepts the ideal of individuality in principle but sternly insists on an ethic of selfless fortitude and temperance in practice. See Green, CW, *Prolegomena*, §§256–80. Moreover at §§289–90 he notes the difficulty that accepting such an ideal even in principle raises for him and promises to deal with it. (He never does: see the editorial note on page 314.)



the community that is the basic notion. This basic notion would be characterized in substantive terms, perfectionist or other. Each individual's good would then be held to consist in laboring noncompetitively for the common good – whether by realizing his or her own talent or by serving that of others – and resources would be distributed in such a way as to maximize the attainment of the common good. Compare Marx's vision of communism: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'. The picture is even closer to Marx if we take it that the common good consists in the free all-round development of the members of the community.

But this reply is not available to Green, for however much it puts the development of individuals back into its account of the content of the good, its logic is inconsistent with constitutive individualism – which Green, as we saw, endorses (section 1). It is in fact a version of the functional view. The good of the individual, on this view, consists in his discharging his role in promoting the good of the social whole. Whether he is to do so by developing some of his talents or serving others is to be determined from the standpoint of that social whole. Against this functional view constitutive individualism appears very attractive. It is not the common good that determines what the good of individuals is; it is, on the contrary, the good of individuals that determines what may or may not feature in the common good. But if that is agreed, Green must accept that there is a good for individuals other than that of striving for the common good.

In Green, as in Comte and in Marx, the communal ideal takes possession of everything. Any other end must find its place within it or be discarded. But in truth the goods of individuals are diverse. There is personal satisfaction in discharging a worthwhile role, and there are things that cannot properly be enjoyed unless shared. But some goods are enjoyed at least in part because they are competitive achievements, in the strong sense that success in competition is part of the enjoyment, and then some goods are quite simply private. If we recognize all these goods as worth pursuing, the question returns, whether each should simply pursue his or her own, or whether some underived principle of impartiality should come into play, and if so how. The same point could be made about Mill's 'proof' of the principle of utility.<sup>64</sup> Mill may have shown that happiness is worth pursuing, but he has not shown whether each should pursue his own, or whether each should pursue the happiness of all.

This leads us to Sidgwick, who made these points about Mill and Green. Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics* (1874) is one of the masterpieces of the utilitarian tradition. Utilitarianism, however, is only one of the three methods it discusses. The others are egoism and what Sidgwick calls 'intuitionism', by which in this

<sup>64</sup> *Utilitarianism*, chap. 4, Mill, CW 10:234–9.

context he means direct appeal to common sense morality. Sidgwick asks what case can be made against the egoist. An egoist who thinks his own good is the only good thing, the only thing that anyone has reason to promote, can be convicted, Sidgwick thinks, of attaching irrational significance to his good as against that of others. But an egoist may instead hold simply that his own good is the only good for him or relative to him. This is neither a tautological nor a self-contradictory doctrine; it is the view, in terms of current ethical theory, that the good of individuals is agent-relative, not agent-neutral. Rational egoism of this kind holds that all ought to pursue what is good relative to them, namely, their own good.

Sidgwick thinks that rational egoism cannot be refuted. And he thinks it is true. He takes it as independently or axiomatically self-evident that the action that would most promote my own good is the action I ought to do.<sup>65</sup> But he also thinks an axiom of impartiality, or 'Rational Benevolence', is self-evident. I ought to do that action that would most promote the good of all, taking each impartially into account.

He concludes that there is a dualism of the practical reason. Since the two requirements may diverge, in the absence of divine providence it may turn out that that practical reason itself makes conflicting demands on action. For Sidgwick, there was thus a very real possibility of ultimate conflict between two rationally mandated doctrines – egoism and utilitarianism – a possibility to which both Bentham and Mill had simply been blind. The problem was starkly exposed by the ebbing of religious faith. Religion had reconciled the pursuit of personal salvation with impartial pursuit of the general good. In its absence, practical reason might be "divided against itself."<sup>66</sup> This was for Sidgwick a deep personal concern throughout his life; his temperament was deeply religious, but he could not find adequate grounds for belief.

Sidgwick's dualism is a strange doctrine. It is not easy to see how it avoids outright contradiction. There is supposed to be a possibility of conflict between the two principles, important enough to be, if it occurs, "an ultimate and fundamental contradiction in our apparent intuitions of what is Reasonable in conduct."<sup>67</sup> So Sidgwick is not simply taking the view that both agent-relative and agent-neutral principles have some authority of their own. He evidently intends something that is stronger, and yet not self-contradictory *ab initio* (in the way that 'I ought to act solely with a view to achieving my own good and I ought to act solely with a view to achieving universal good' would be). But he never explains exactly what. Moreover, it is one thing to say that the egoist cannot be

<sup>65</sup> He never states it as an axiom in so many words, but it is clear that he would endorse it.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1907), 508.

<sup>67</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods*, 508.

silenced if he plays his cards right, another to find his principle rationally self-evident. If one takes the positive step, does that not ipso facto undermine the alleged self-evidence of an impartial principle? On the other hand, if one thinks it self-evident that the good of every individual has agent-neutral value, and no individual's has greater agent-neutral value than any other's, must that not limit, in some decisive way, the authority of agent-relative principles? The question is whether there is a stable viewpoint that simultaneously gives both principles an equal place. Or is it that we are caught in an unstable dualism of points of view that cannot be unified?

Sidgwick's work crystallizes an issue that had been slid past by nineteenth-century moral philosophers. There is a principle of impartiality that utilitarians took as basic, without making it clear that they were doing so. Post-Kantian idealists do not wish to give it up, but they do not want to treat it as basic. So they must somehow arrive at it from within their self-realizationist approach. Sidgwick shows that if it is to be introduced at all, it must be introduced as basic. But he also sees that there are egoistic, partial, or agent-relative reasons that are not derived from this principle.<sup>68</sup> In Sidgwick's work the problem of individual and social good is formulated at a fully theoretical level of ethics.

### CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

What general themes can be discerned in the story we have told?

1. It is striking how powerful for many nineteenth-century thinkers the communal ideal of at-one-ness was, together with the vision of a coming organic age. This is evident in Comtean positivism and Marxism, but the influence of these ideas is much wider.
2. Also powerful, though not so widespread, is the ideal of self-realization. Two of its forms had notable influence: the ethic of individuality and the ethic of conscience. Marx sought to integrate the former, Green the latter, with the communal ideal.
3. Liberals, while not untouched by the communal ideal, worried much more about the loss of individuality and the prospect of populist despotism in the coming democratic age.
4. In the earlier part of the century everyone worried about what integrating principle could unite a society without a creed. One powerful (all too powerful?) answer was provided by Hegel: the nation-state itself could be the new faith and the new home. In an emotionally much thinner form, something like the same answer is provided by Mill: liberal principles themselves can provide bases of allegiance.

<sup>68</sup> There also seem to be plenty of reasons that are not derived from either standpoint, including the reasons highlighted by the intuitionistic moralist. It is not clear what Sidgwick means to say about this: in this respect his treatment remains obscure.

And far more tentatively, how does the story continue?

1. Extreme communal ideals, so powerful in nineteenth-century philosophical thought, burst into politics in the first half of the twentieth century. But in the second half the communal ideal of society lost substantial ground. The liberal law state was reaffirmed, while the relationship between community and state began to be increasingly detached. For Hegel, citizenship of a state is the individual's most significant communal membership. But (i) the growth of global legal order and (ii) multiculturalism within states diminish the nation-state as a focus of communal at-one-ness.
2. The fear of instability in a creedless democratic society, which was so powerful among early nineteenth-century thinkers, turns out – at least so far as the evidence of the *second* half of the twentieth century can be relied on – to be misguided. Although in this period negative criticism prevails as never before in the world of the spirit, it has been defused. Our age is simultaneously critical and organic.
3. On the other hand, liberal fear of mediocrity and of loss of wholeness remains cogent. The harmoniously developed individuals of Schiller's, Mill's, or Marx's vision are no more easy to find now than then – in fact, they are less easy to find. Specialization, consumerism, and moral populism prevail. Liberal fears, it seems, have proved more lasting than Marxist hopes. Today's 'neutralist' liberalism may well be more functional to the societies in which we live than the Schillerian or 'aristocratic'<sup>69</sup> liberalisms of the nineteenth century, but it marks a retreat from these earlier ethical ideals. More generally, have those nineteenth-century ideals – of living in community, 'objective freedom', conscientious striving, developed spontaneity – all been discredited in our postmodern age? Is anything to be put in their place?

Even if we agree on something like this balance sheet so far, it is needless to say that we have little idea of what is to come. Few now believe in the inevitability of history or the possibility of philosophical prophecy. Moral and political thinkers who want to reverse these apparent trends have everything to play for.

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## MORAL EPISTEMOLOGY, 1788–1870

J. B. SCHNEEWIND AND ALLEN W. WOOD

The aftermath of the French Revolution forced European thinkers to confront the problem of restoring and preserving social stability. Could a revitalized Christianity ensure that the great mass of the population would not be swept up again in revolutionary fervor? If Christianity could no longer perform the task of teaching contentment with their lot to the disenfranchised and poor, what could do so? The consequences of trying to reform society had proven devastating in France. No one wanted to bring such upheavals upon Europe again. Was every reformist doctrine as dangerous as the doctrine of the rights of man? Or was some sort of reform a price to be paid for the restoration of order?

Revolutions and reform movements during the first two-thirds of the century kept such questions alive. In British and French moral philosophy between the French Revolution and the Franco-Prussian War the question of the role of intuition in providing moral knowledge was a central theme. The recurrent social and political crises of the period help explain why. Those who shaped opinion agreed that general acceptance of Christianity was essential to social stability. Philosophers who took intuition to provide the basis of morality were taken to be supporting religion. Most of those who rejected intuitionism were not. On both sides, the epistemological issue had two parts. One concerned the ultimate justification for moral belief. Almost no one thought morality was wholly a matter of feeling.<sup>1</sup> What rational warrant, then, could it have? The other concerned the extent to which warranted moral beliefs are available to everyone whose conduct they should guide. Can we all think out for ourselves what we ought to do, or must some people – perhaps the majority – take their morals on authority from others?

The task of the Christian philosopher was put concisely by an American admirer of Coleridge: it is “to investigate those higher and peculiar attributes, which distinguish us from the brutes that perish – which are the image of God in

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Brown is the sole exception I have found: see his *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1820), 3:581, 590.

us.” Reason is the chief of these higher powers, and we must suppose “that reason has the same power of intuitive insight in relation to certain moral and spiritual truths, as in relation to the truths of geometry.” Intuition gives us truths that all reasonable beings, including God, must accept. Reason and religion are not at odds.<sup>2</sup> By means of intuition, the one leads us to the other.

The chief enemy of what was commonly called ‘spiritualism’ was empiricism. Locke in England and Condillac in France were taken to be reductionist sensualists. For them, sensory experiences are the source of all ideas; the mind has no powers except those of turning sensations into complex and abstract ideas and stringing these together; and present sensations alone determine the will. Hume was taken to have shown the disastrous skepticism to which such views inevitably lead.<sup>3</sup> But Locke had allied himself to Newton, and the alliance seemed to hold. One problem for intuitionists was, therefore, to show that empiricism did not own science.

#### REID

Thomas Reid was the major source for nineteenth-century intuitionism in Britain, France, and the United States. His lectures defending common sense beliefs were dry but clear and comprehensive.<sup>4</sup> The philosophy of common sense was spread in more elegant prose by Dugald Stewart, taught in many colleges in the northeastern United States, and introduced to France in translation.<sup>5</sup> Underlying all of Reid’s thought is a ‘providential naturalism’, for which the basic observable facts about our intellectual and active powers are indications of

<sup>2</sup> Dr. James Marsh, “Preliminary Essay,” introducing Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (London, 1913), xxxi–xxxv (originally published in Burlington, Vt., 1825).

<sup>3</sup> For an instance of this commonplace, see William H. Channing’s “Preface” to his translation of Theodore Jouffroy, *Introduction to Ethics*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1848), 12–13. Cf. Theodore Jouffroy, *Introduction to Ethics* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, 1840). Channing describes Kant as having discovered through his deep analysis of the human mind “that intuitive reason suggests primary ideas,” which apply to experience though not derived from it. This “psychological information” he adds, “substituted spiritualism in place of sensualism forever.”

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Reid, *Works*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, 9th ed. (Edinburgh, 1895) [hereafter Reid, *Works*]. His moral philosophy is in his *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (Edinburgh, 1789). For further details derived from unpublished lecture notes, see Reid’s *Practical Ethics*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Reid, *Oeuvres complètes*, trans. Theodore Jouffroy (Paris, 1836); Dugald Stewart, *Esquisses de philosophie morale*, trans. Theodore Jouffroy (Paris, 1833). For the importance abroad of Scottish philosophy, see Michel Malberge, “The Impact on Europe,” and Samuel Fleischacker, “The Impact on America: Scottish Philosophy and the American Founding,” both in *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Philosophy*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See also Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America 1720–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chaps. 4–5.

God's intentions.<sup>6</sup> Locke and Hume simply failed to observe carefully enough. Attending only to sensations, they failed to see that experience displays our possession of innate powers of thought and action. Proper philosophical analysis of the factual and moral knowledge that common sense possesses enables us to make explicit the intuitively evident principles given by those powers. Everyone, including the skeptic, thinks and acts in terms set by these principles. Experience properly observed thus provides a mass of material that shows empiricism, skepticism, and irreligion to be mistaken. Science and religion are not at odds.

Reid held that intuitively known first principles, universal in scope, are required to avoid an infinite regress in the justification of claims to knowledge.<sup>7</sup> They are rational principles, carried in concepts not obtainable from sensations. Against Hume, who held that reason must be guided by passion, Reid argued that the very idea of our own good on the whole is a construction of reason based on consideration of particular goods. The concept of duty, delivered in general principles about what we ought to do, is itself simple and indefinable. Hume's demand that we explain the notion of 'ought' is ridiculous: everyone understands and can use the concept. Morality is certainly shot through with feeling, Reid allows, but moral feelings themselves depend on moral principles and are not their source. To say, as Hume did, that moral judgments merely express feelings is to fail to grasp the logic implicit in ordinary moral judgments. 'You acted rightly' and 'I feel a special feeling toward you' have quite different subjects: one is about you, the other about me. They cannot have the same meaning.<sup>8</sup>

Practical principles furnish us with reasons for action, to which we, unlike animals, are able freely to respond. Following Bishop Butler, Reid insisted on an irreducible plurality of first moral principles. We ought indeed to pursue our own good on the whole, but conscience, or the moral faculty, informs us of other principles as well. To treat others as we would be treated, to act for the good of others, and to pay debts before bestowing charity are among the many dictates intuitively known to all. Reasons derived from principles like these naturally claim authority over other kinds of reason. This special claim plainly shows that God means conscience to guide all our actions. Our conclusions about complicated individual cases may not be as certain as the principles we apply to them. But Reid held that God has made available to everyone equally the direction we need to act virtuously in carrying out our duties.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Reid, *Practical Ethics*, ed. Haakonssen, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Reid, *Works*, 435ff.

<sup>8</sup> Reid, *Works*, 672–3.

<sup>9</sup> For fuller accounts, see J. B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), chap. 2.i, and Haakonssen's "Introduction" to Reid, *Practical Ethics*, 38–52.



## BENTHAM

If Reid had published earlier, he would have been among the intuitionists whom Bentham dismissed in the first two chapters of his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, published in 1789.<sup>10</sup> Principles that could only be supported by claiming to know them intuitively left morality up to the whim or caprice of the person making the claim. Faced with serious disagreement on public issues, claims of this kind amounted, Bentham held, to a tyrannical wish to have one's own view prevail. They did nothing to supply what was needed in a moral principle: "something that points out some external consideration, as a means of warranting and guiding the internal sentiments of approbation and disapprobation."<sup>11</sup> Bentham proposed to settle moral disputes by seeing which of the disputed acts would bring about human happiness. This utilitarian standard, he held, proposes an empirically discoverable measurement pointing to the solution to any practical problem.

Admitting with the intuitionists that a first principle cannot be proven, Bentham nonetheless argued for his own by pointing out the practical problems entailed by its rejection. He also argued that it could provide a test for established laws and traditional institutions. And he thought England was badly in need of reforms in these areas. He did not ask whether ordinary people could themselves use the principle to help them decide what to do. Though he became more democratic in attitude as he grew older, he did not make it a test of a first principle that it should enable everyone alike to be able to think out moral issues for himself.

'Intuitionism' and 'utilitarianism' became misleading labels for the two main schools of moral philosophy in early and mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Going beyond epistemology, the intuitionists denied that morality's function is solely to increase pleasure or human happiness; they claimed intuitive knowledge of other, equally important moral principles. The utilitarians were concerned not just with usefulness but with ends. The one end, in their view, was pleasure and the absence of pain (including, Bentham held, those of animals). In these arguments, epistemological disagreement carried major social and religious burdens. Denying the ability to intuit, and making happiness simply a matter of pleasure as Bentham did, seemed to the one side to degrade humans to the level of animals.

<sup>10</sup> I cite from *A Fragment on Government and An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. Wilfrid Harrison (Oxford, Blackwell, 1948). The work was set in type in 1780, but Bentham held back publication.

<sup>11</sup> Bentham, *A Fragment on Government and An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chap. II.12, 140.

Insistence that the Christian common sense of England was warranted by an infallible epistemic power seemed to the other side a dodge used to support the existing oppressive class structure. Moral epistemology mattered, but at least until the last quarter of the century it did not matter for its own sake.

### COUSIN

Under Victor Cousin (1792–1867) spiritualism, built around intuitionism, came to dominate the officially approved teaching of French philosophy.<sup>12</sup> The French Revolution drove the Catholic Church out of the schools; Napoleon distrusted philosophy altogether; Cousin aimed to construct a doctrine that would avoid both royalism and Catholicism while keeping France devoted to constitutional monarchy and Christianity. Following the lead of his teacher Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard (1763–1845), he saw Reid as providing the best weapons against empiricism.<sup>13</sup> Royer-Collard's scant published work contains nothing on ethics.<sup>14</sup> Cousin and his disciple Theodore Jouffroy made up for the neglect.

Cousin's *Lectures on the True, the Beautiful, and the Good* (1853) draw together much of his earlier teaching and writing.<sup>15</sup> His preface explains that although he accepts the label 'eclectic' his "true flag is spiritualism." He teaches "the spirituality of the soul, the liberty and responsibility of human actions, moral obligation ... a God ... who, after having evidently made man for an excellent end, will not abandon him."<sup>16</sup> Philosophy for him is itself the complete science of the mind. Past philosophers have observed different aspects of the mind's activity; eclecticism puts the best insights together. The most important of these is the realization that "there are universal and necessary principles at the head of all sciences."<sup>17</sup> For

<sup>12</sup> Recalled to teaching in 1828 after politics drove him out of it, Cousin became the government official in charge of the philosophy taught in all the lycées in France. He controlled appointments as well as texts. Politics again removed him from office in 1848. John I. Brooks, *The Eclectic Legacy: Academic Philosophy and the Human Sciences in Nineteenth-Century France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 36ff.

<sup>13</sup> Empiricism was represented not only by Locke and Condillac but also by Destutt de Tracy, who reformulated it in his *Éléments d'idéologie* (Paris, 1801–5). He says nothing about moral philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> In an appendix to his translation of Reid, Jouffroy presented writings of Royer-Collard. Cousin admired Dugald Stewart's work, especially that in ethics, which Jouffroy translated in 1826. See Victor Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques* (Paris: Didier, 1856), 238.

<sup>15</sup> I cite from the English translation: *The True, the Beautiful, and the Good*, trans. O. W. Wight (New York: D. Appleton, 1854). Cousin was a prolific writer, and much of his work was translated, especially into English.

<sup>16</sup> Cousin, *Lectures*, ix–x.

<sup>17</sup> Cousin, *Lectures*, 35.

ethics, these principles are all contained in the idea of the good.<sup>18</sup> To investigate them by the appropriate psychological method, we must study the “natural and permanent belief of the human race” about the good.<sup>19</sup>

What we find is that ordinary language is inexplicable unless there is a unique, indefinable idea of the good. We all make distinctions that presuppose this idea: between justice and injustice, between regret and remorse, between interest and virtue, between legitimate power and tyrannical usurpation. We all see that we are obligated to conform to good and justice. We know that we are free to do so, regardless of our interests. And we know that we deserve reward when we do, and punishment when we fail.<sup>20</sup> We distinguish the useful from both the good and the just, Cousin said, and therefore utilitarianism has no foundation. Kant saw this, he added, but did not see that justice is founded on the good. The judgment of good “is a simple, primitive, undecomposable judgment.”<sup>21</sup> All our other moral ideas can be explained in terms of the idea of the good. Moral judgments reveal “real characters of human actions,” which are not observable by the senses. As is true with all intuited principles, truth is seen at first in particular cases and then grasped as universal. We possess the principle even when we only make the particular judgment.<sup>22</sup> Such principles are built into the human mind. What “separates the peasant from the philosopher” is that the latter has reflected on the principles that also guide the former even without his being aware of them.<sup>23</sup> Though moral thought is often emotional, the distinctively moral sentiments depend on moral judgments.

#### ST. SIMON AND COMTE

Cousin showed no more originality in the morality of duties to God, self, and others that he based on this epistemology than he had shown in taking over Reid’s intuitionism.<sup>24</sup> His most enduring opposition came from far more radical thinkers on the Left: St. Simon and Auguste Comte. Though both were thinkers of importance for politics, they had little to say about morals. St. Simon and Comte agreed that history had brought us to the point at which scientific thinking, preeminently Newton’s, could be seen to be the proper model for all cognitive endeavors. Physiology and psychology, the sciences of man, St. Simon declared

<sup>18</sup> Cousin, *Lectures*, 245.

<sup>19</sup> Cousin, *Lectures*, 247.

<sup>20</sup> Cousin, *Lectures*, 325, 253–7.

<sup>21</sup> Cousin, *Lectures*, 325.

<sup>22</sup> Cousin, *Lectures*, 327.

<sup>23</sup> Cousin, *Lectures*, 62–3.

<sup>24</sup> Theodore Jouffroy’s *Introduction to Ethics* (1840) is largely a survey of past views from Cousin’s standpoint and offers nothing new.

in 1813, “will be brought under the same method as the other physical sciences” and will thus become “positive.” This in turn will bring about “a reorganization of the religious, political, ethical, and educational system.”<sup>25</sup> The destruction caused by the French Revolution made a new understanding of society absolutely required if anarchy were to be prevented. Science, St. Simon was sure, would give us what we need. But although he had strikingly original ideas about the reorganization of society, he said nothing about how we are to conceptualize morality once it becomes positive.

Comte said only a little. His own times, he held, were undergoing a transition from formerly useful religious and metaphysical doctrines to an age of science. Each main branch of human knowledge is destined to pass through religious and metaphysical stages and to end in a positive stage. A fully positive sociology and politics are now requisite to lead us out of turmoil. The doctrine of the divine right of kings belonged to the religious stage; social contract and natural rights theories suited the metaphysical period. The new job of science was to show what social and political life would be once these vestiges are all eliminated. The movement is inevitable: political science merely observes and explains what is happening but does not guide it.<sup>26</sup>

“In the determination of the new system,” Comte said,

it is necessary to abstract from the advantage or the disadvantages of this system. . . . The sole question must be, what is the social system destined . . . to be established today? . . . because the positive idea of goodness and that of conformity with the state of civilization meet at their origin, we are certain to have the best system practicable today if we seek the one that is most in conformity with the state of civilization.

Because Comte held that the idea of goodness is not positive in itself, it is perhaps not accurate to call this a definition. But it is close to one, and Comte did not elaborate. His point plainly was that the idea of goodness taken apart from the idea of the current stage of history is empty. We must use the latter idea as our guide.<sup>27</sup> And since Comte saw the replacement of religion by science as marking progress, it is plain that his views would have been no more welcome to the French defenders of spiritualism than those of Bentham were to their English counterparts.

<sup>25</sup> Henri, Comte de Saint-Simon, *Selected Writings*, ed. F. M. H. Markham. Oxford: Blackwell, 1951, p 21.

<sup>26</sup> Auguste Comte, *Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. H. S. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 110.

<sup>27</sup> Comte, *Early Political Writings*, 81–3, 100, 105. Another problem arises here, since Comte is generally against reductionist views about the sciences. For each level of complexity in the world science must introduce new basic concepts that are not wholly explicable in terms of the scientific ideas used for a simpler aspect of the world. Thus physiology is not reducible to physics. But here Comte seems to imply that morality is reducible to sociology and politics.

## WHEWELL

The English philosophers of the earlier nineteenth century did rather more than the French to advance the discussion of intuitionism. William Whewell held that the diffusion of what he referred to as the “low” morality of hedonistic utilitarianism resulted in destroying the importance of virtue and “produced a profligate and sensual tone of moral discussion.”<sup>28</sup> The “high” morality taught by Christianity could only be defended by appeal to intuitions. Mill also thought that the stakes were considerable. “The notion that truths external to the mind may be known by intuition,” he said,

is, . . . in these times, the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institutions. By the aid of this theory, every inveterate belief and every intense feeling, of which the origin is not remembered, is enabled to dispense with the obligation of justifying itself by reason. . . . There never was such an instrument devised for consecrating all deep seated prejudices.<sup>29</sup>

Intuitionism, Mill held, derives its main strength from the belief that intuitions are required in mathematics and the physical sciences. His *System of Logic* (1842) was meant to undercut this belief by giving an empiricist account of all knowledge. Whewell was equally systematic. His pioneering work in the history and philosophy of science argued for the centrality of intuition properly understood in all scientific disciplines. And his views on intuition were more elaborate than those of the Scottish common sense philosophers.

Whewell worked out an epistemology for which historical development is central. Intuition, for him, is insight into eternal Ideas in God’s mind. Over the ages our insight increases. In science it increases as we use early partial insights to organize empirically discovered data, and then use the felt inadequacies of our grasp of the data to propel ourselves to improved understanding of the fundamental Ideas of the sciences. Thus theory guides observation and observation helps lead to more comprehensive and detailed theory. In practice we begin with a clear grasp of the fundamental moral Ideas. What is improved is our understanding of how and when to apply them. We all always know that man is to be loved as man, for instance, but it takes time before we see that we are to love even our enemies. Scientific progress therefore results from broadening and deepening our grasp of the theoretical Ideas. Moral progress follows rather from extending the

<sup>28</sup> William Whewell, *History of the Inductive Sciences from the Earliest to the Present Time* (New York: D. Appleton, 1858), 79.

<sup>29</sup> J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963–91) [henceforth Mill, CW], vol. 1, chap. VII, 233.

range of the persons and acts that we see to be covered by the Ideas containing the principles of morality.

Though he rejected utilitarianism with scorn, Whewell agreed with the utilitarian claim that morality ought to give us a single rule that can answer all moral questions. Morality is rationality applied to human action; if there were multiple rules, we might have to admit contradictions within reason. Although the fundamental Idea of morality is simple and undefinable, it encompasses Ideas governing the different spheres of life. The main virtues covered by the basic Idea – benevolence, truthfulness, justice, purity, and order, or obedience to law – can be articulated in terms of valid rules of duty. Whewell developed a comprehensive system of morals and politics from the rules. And he argued that the system includes all of mankind's most widely accepted moral convictions. The morality available through intuition to everyone alike is thus shown to have a rational basis, as does science, and both of them lead us to God.

#### MILL

John Stuart Mill followed the St. Simonians in thinking that he was living during a transitional period.<sup>30</sup> Old ideas backed by old authorities that had once held society together were no longer adequate. He set himself to provide new concepts and less authoritarian methods of winning social acceptance for them. His *System of Logic* was intended to help people think clearly and carefully. It ended with the chapter "The Logic of Practice ... including Morality," which is a key to understanding his moral epistemology.

Moral knowledge, Mill says, is essentially expressed "not in the indicative but in the imperative mood." The reason is that morality itself is an art, and like all arts, it depends on an end or goal. In any art, scientific knowledge can tell us facts about how to reach ends we have already accepted. With these facts we can construct rules about how to behave. But the rules themselves are not absolute. We must treat them not the way judges treat laws – as unquestionably given – but the way legislators do – as needing to be made or revised. For this we must know the end by which rules are to be judged, and science cannot give us ends. Its propositions "assert a matter of fact." Assertions about ends, however, "enjoin or recommend that something should be." And a proposition with the predicate *should be*, Mill says, is "generically different from one which is expressed by *is* or *will be*."

So far Mill seemed to agree with the claim of the intuitionists, that the basic concept in morals is unique and irreducible to empirical terms. But of course he held a different view. There is, he said, a matter of fact affirmed in *ought*

<sup>30</sup> See Mill's "The Spirit of the Age," a series of newspaper articles reprinted in Mill, CW, vol. 22.

propositions. It is that the speaker approves of the conduct referred to in them. For such a feeling to be a reason for anyone to act, however, it must be justified. If approval is directed toward the final end of an art, that end must be shown to be desirable. Only then can we begin to consider whether we really ought to follow the rules or principles directing us to bring it about.<sup>31</sup>

Mill's view here matched Bentham's insistence on having some "external consideration" to warrant feelings of approval. But in the *System of Logic* Mill did not tell us what external considerations might justify the approval we feel for an ultimate end of conduct. In *Utilitarianism* he tried to do so.<sup>32</sup> Nothing can be desirable, he said, unless people desire it. And what does everyone really desire? Happiness. Happiness is therefore at least one ultimate goal. And analysis reveals that all other goals are desired as constitutive parts of happiness. Happiness is thus the only goal desired for itself, and so it must be the final end to be used in assessing rules proposed for morality.

Two points about this hotly debated argument are worth making here. One is that Mill did not mean it to be a deductive proof, from premises about what is in fact desired to a conclusion about what is worthy of desire or what should be desired. The other is that the desires to which Mill appealed are the this-worldly uncorrected desires of humans as they are. There is no concern that our nature may be corrupted or that some of our desires may be discounted as inherently evil. It is not an accident that Mill did not even discuss religious views of desire. His moral epistemology was meant to exclude them.

The intuitionists all held that at least the basic principles of morals are equally knowable by everyone alike. Bentham and his followers relied on the advice of experts when they sought to reform the laws and practices of England. Could ordinary people be trusted to know how to bring about the greatest happiness of the greatest number? Mill gives a strongly affirmative answer. The ordinary morality we all learn as children, the morality embedded in ordinary language, he held, is itself the repository of humanity's accumulated learning about the sources of happiness.<sup>33</sup> We need to calculate consequences only rarely, where special problems arise. Everyone ordinarily knows quite well enough how to act. With this answer Mill claimed that utilitarianism, like intuitionism, could accommodate the common sense morality of mankind.

The fullest and most acute contemporary critique of Mill's ethics was John Grote's *Examination of the Utilitarian Philosophy*, published posthumously in 1870.<sup>34</sup> Grote's own view was Christian and "spiritualist," as his own constructive work

<sup>31</sup> This and the preceding paragraph rely on Mill's *System of Logic*, chap. xii, Mill, CW, vol. 6.

<sup>32</sup> The argument is given in chap. IV of *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:234–9.

<sup>33</sup> *Utilitarianism*, chap. II, Mill, CW 10:224–5.

<sup>34</sup> Grote was Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, in succession to Whewell.

makes evident.<sup>35</sup> He objected to Mill's failure to work out a careful account of the meanings of moral terms, and he underlined Mill's apparent inability to provide any account of exactly how observations of fact could be used to justify propositions about what should be. He himself thought that only intuited moral principles could enable us to use empirical data to guide our actions. Grote had been working on these objections ever since Mill published *Utilitarianism* as magazine articles in 1861. His criticisms were undoubtedly discussed in the Cambridge philosophy group that met regularly with him. One of the younger philosophers attending the meetings was Henry Sidgwick. Himself a devoted admirer of Mill, he entered the controversy between intuitionism and utilitarianism when both positions had reached maturity. In his *Methods of Ethics*, 1874, he treated the issues of moral epistemology with a new sophistication and thoroughness. But in the end he agreed with his predecessors in linking the defensibility of a moral epistemology of intuitionism with the defensibility of a religious outlook.<sup>36</sup>

In German philosophy of the early nineteenth century, the issues were somewhat different from those that preoccupied English philosophers, and the battle lines were differently drawn. The German idealists were generally agreed on "spiritualism" and on the rejection of "materialism" or "empiricism," but their ways of integrating spiritual or religious concerns into ethics all departed in one way or another from religious orthodoxy. Nor would it be accurate to describe their rejection of empiricism as "intuitionist." The right term would rather be "rationalist" – both in the sense that they sought to ground moral knowledge in a discursive faculty of reason rather than in a simple faculty of intuition, and in the sense that they looked to autonomous reason rather than experience or external authority (social or religious) as the foundation for moral duties. The principal focus of their attention was to determine the relationship between a philosophical – that is, a transcendental or speculative – science of morals and the kind of moral knowledge that ordinary moral agents are thought to have. A recurring theme in the German idealists was also the role of society (of social institutions and customs, or else of some ideal of a rational society) in the determination of moral truth and moral knowledge.

#### KANT

We can see the beginnings of these concerns already in the moral philosophy of Kant. He was persuaded that even the least intelligent and least educated human

<sup>35</sup> John Grote, *Treatise on the Moral Ideals* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, 1876), is a difficult work, assembled by Joseph Bickersteth Mayor from manuscripts Grote left in some disorder.

<sup>36</sup> This comes out strikingly on the final page of Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics* (London, 1874), 473. The passage was removed from later editions; it is given in Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*, 352.



being, as much as the most intelligent and educated, had all the *cognitive* equipment necessary for morality: “The moral cognition of common human reason ... needs no science and philosophy to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, or indeed, even wise and virtuous.”<sup>37</sup> At the same time, Kant proposed a formulation of the law that common reason “has always before its eyes,” one requiring that I be able to will the maxim of my action to be a universal law.<sup>38</sup> This was commonly understood as providing a “formalistic” criterion for right action, and as prescribing a method for determining which actions are morally permissible and impermissible. But there seems to be a tension between presenting a philosophical formula of this kind and saying that ordinary individuals need no help from philosophy to know already what they ought to do. In his last major work on practical philosophy, the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1798), Kant deepened the sources of perplexity by presenting moral reasoning in quite a different way again. It was now seen as a matter of weighing a system of ethical duties – some of them “strict” or “perfect,” others “wide” or “imperfect,” all grounded on a set of “duties of virtue” or “ends that are the same time duties” – which ends encompass all those falling under the headings “my own perfection” and “the happiness of others.”<sup>39</sup> My cognitive task as a moral agent is not to test my maxims according to a criterion of universalizability, but rather to devise a life for myself in which I refrain from the actions forbidden by strict duties while perfecting myself and contributing to the happiness of others in ways that are up to me. Kant further acknowledged the existence and importance of duties contingent on the special condition of others or my particular relationships to them (thus encompassing duties consequent on contingent social institutions and relations), but he regarded these as falling beyond the scope of a “metaphysical” system of duties, based solely on reasoning from the a priori moral principle as applied to empirical human nature in general.<sup>40</sup> Despite this, Kantian ethics continued to be associated primarily with a “formalistic” principle demanding universalizability of maxims, and such a principle is down to the present day widely regarded as Kant’s chief (perhaps his only) contribution to moral epistemology. From the start, however, Kant’s principle was a source of perplexity and an object of criticism, as regards both what it implies and whether it affords a defensible moral criterion at all.

<sup>37</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [henceforth Kant, Ak], 4:404.

<sup>38</sup> Kant, Ak 4:403, 421.

<sup>39</sup> Kant, Ak 6:389–95.

<sup>40</sup> Kant, Ak 6:468–74.

## FICHTE

A creative step toward solving the perplexities arising out of Kant's theory was made (roughly contemporaneously with the *Metaphysics of Morals*) by the founder of the emerging post-Kantian German idealist movement, Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In his *System of Ethics* (1798), Fichte drew a sharp distinction between the manner in which moral duties are known by ordinary agents and their scientific derivation as part of a system of transcendental philosophy. The former had to do with the individual's conscience, the latter with the conceptual system of duties, which Fichte related in part to a scheme of social roles and functions. Fichte accepted that Kant's principle was merely "formal," telling us in effect only to act according to our conscience.<sup>41</sup> He thought the content had to be supplied by the agent's conscientious reflection on the particular situation of each action and the demands of the moral law. It is theoretical understanding that supplies the content of our duties. But when moral reflections are carried out in the right way, they always result in a feeling of certainty regarding which action ought to be done.<sup>42</sup> This feeling of certainty constitutes *conscience* – which for Fichte is an immediate feeling of the harmony between my particular selfhood and the universal or absolute I that serves as the norm of rationality.<sup>43</sup> Certainty about what I ought to do, he argued, must always be possible, since otherwise it would be only a matter of chance whether we can act as we ought, and that can never be a matter of chance.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Fichte holds that conscience properly speaking cannot err.<sup>45</sup> Conscience is *infallible*. Fichte does not deny, of course, that people can err about what their duty is. His claim is rather that such error is always culpable, the result of a "darkening of one's consciousness," that is, self-deception or negligence in moral reflection.<sup>46</sup>

The fundamental form taken by moral knowledge is the awareness for any object of its final end (*Endzweck*) regarding the agent's own freedom.<sup>47</sup> Fichte sees the moral life, however, as a determinate series of possible actions required of each agent. Of the manifold possibilities open to the agent at any time, one action only is in conformity with duty; the others are all opposed to it.<sup>48</sup> Fichte

<sup>41</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1971) [henceforth Fichte, SW], 4:156.

<sup>42</sup> Fichte, SW 4:173.

<sup>43</sup> Fichte, SW 4:166.

<sup>44</sup> Fichte, SW 4:168–9.

<sup>45</sup> Fichte, SW 3:174.

<sup>46</sup> Fichte, SW 4:192–6.

<sup>47</sup> Fichte, SW 4:172.

<sup>48</sup> Fichte, SW 4:206–9.

is actually guilty of the kind of terrifying rigorism of which Kant is often falsely accused. "If anyone thinks this morality is austere and painful, we cannot help him, for there is no other."<sup>49</sup>

Fichte's systematic (philosophical) exposition divided moral duties into four categories:<sup>50</sup>

1. General conditioned duties: Duties applicable to everyone that are self-regarding (e.g., self-preservation, self-respect, self-perfection).
2. Particular conditioned duties: The duty to select a social estate (*Stand*) and a vocation in life suited to one's powers and temperament.<sup>51</sup>
3. General unconditioned duties: Duties to others that are applicable to everyone regardless of estate (duties to respect the rightful freedom of others and general duties of beneficence to them).
4. Particular unconditioned duties: The duties of one's estate and vocation. Under this heading, Fichte includes the duties of husband and wife to each other, and to their children, but also the duties of the particular callings and vocations that constitute a rational social order. Here he divides vocations into those dealing with direct human interaction with the natural world and those involving the rational self-government of human beings. The former include agriculture, mining, artisanship, and mercantile activities. The latter include the positions of state officials, scholar-educators, "moral teachers of the people" (clergy), and aesthetic artists. Fichte thus clearly anticipates Hegel's later idea that the rational system of moral duties follows the anatomy of a rational social order or "ethical life."

#### FRIES

Fichte's moral philosophy is admirable for the uncompromising rigor with which it works out certain basic principles to which it is committed. But some of its conclusions are daunting or even terrifying. One of the hardest parts of Fichte's moral epistemology to accept is the idea that we must be able to be infallibly certain what our duty demands, if only we do our best to determine this. A more reasonable position would seem to be that the human condition is sufficiently complex that we cannot always be certain what we ought to do, and even our best reflections are fallible. We might think, however, that if we have done our best, no more should be demanded of us, and we should not be held to blame for our innocent mistakes. That thought seems to be behind Kant's position that conscientiousness can always be demanded of me, even though I am liable to err in moral matters even if I am conscientious. But since conscientiousness consists not in the objective judgment about what my duty is, but rather in the subjective

<sup>49</sup> Fichte, SW 4:216.

<sup>50</sup> Fichte, SW 4:258.

<sup>51</sup> Fichte, SW 4:271–3.

judgment that compares my action with my law of reason, for Kant too it turns out that conscience is infallible and cannot err – though what Kant means by this claim is not the same as what Fichte means by it:

An erring conscience is an absurdity. For while I can indeed be mistaken at times in my objective judgment as to whether something is a duty or not, I cannot be mistaken in my subjective judgment as to whether I have submitted it to my practical reason (here in its role as judge) for such a judgment; for if I could be mistaken in that, I would have made no practical judgment at all, and in that case there would be neither truth nor error. . . . But if someone is aware that he has acted in accordance with his conscience, nothing more can be required of him. It is incumbent on him only to enlighten his understanding in the matter of what is or is not duty.<sup>52</sup>

This position regarding the possibility, and also the significance, of moral error may be regarded as the starting point for J. F. Fries's "ethics of conviction." Like Fichte, Fries accepts that the moral principle is only formal, and that the content of duty must be determined by conscientious reflection on the situation of action. Conscientiousness requires of us that we form a "conviction" about what our duty is, and that we follow this conviction. "The command of duties of virtue commands: to act from respect for the law according to one's conviction of what the duty of virtue requires."<sup>53</sup> The "immediate command of virtue" is "Give allegiance to your own conviction of duty!"<sup>54</sup>

Fries, however, regards conscientious conviction as fallible and always capable of further education. So conviction, hence conscience, can sometimes tell us something objectively wrong about what our duty is. Fries too, therefore, asserts the infallibility of conscience, though what he means by the assertion is again something quite different from what either Kant or Fichte means by it:

It can easily appear that the doctrine of the infallibility of conscience stands against this doctrine of the educability of conscience. The following should clear this up. For the man who has attained to purity (*Lauterkeit*), conscience is *infallible* according to an identical proposition; for no more can be demanded of any human being than that he faithfully follow his *pure* conviction. Now since conscience expresses that conviction, it is always right for every individual human being in the moment.<sup>55</sup>

From this Fries inferred that when we judge others' actions morally, we must always do so by their moral convictions, never by our own – even if our convictions are objectively correct and theirs are objectively wrong.

<sup>52</sup> Kant, Ak 6:401.

<sup>53</sup> J. F. Fries, *Neue Kritik der Vernunft* (Heidelberg: Mohr, 1807); later edition under the title *Anthropologische Kritik der Vernunft* (Heidelberg: Mohr & Winter, 1838), 3:189.

<sup>54</sup> J. F. Fries, *Handbuch der Praktischen Philosophie*, 1. Teil: *Ethik* (Heidelberg: Mohr & Winter, 1818), 243.

<sup>55</sup> Fries, *Handbuch der Praktischen Philosophie*, 214–15.

The first law of the philosophical theory of virtue is that of the good disposition of character: respect for the practical spirit. Correctness of conviction in respect of the command is by contrast only the second law. Hence the first rule by which I should compare the actions of others with the duty of virtue must be distinguished from the rule that tells me what duties are laid on me. For each is to be judged only according to his own conviction, and what would be wrong to do according to a correct conviction can for the individual be precisely what accords with duty.<sup>56</sup>

Fries thinks that when we judge actions only for their external rightness (their “legality,” according to the laws of right and the state), we may and even must apply objectively correct standards. But when we are judging the inner moral worth of an individual, the only relevant standard is the individual’s pure conviction. Thus someone who is erroneously convinced that it is his duty to commit a murder may be punished for his crime under the law, but we must honor him as a moral being just as we would someone who followed a correct moral conviction.<sup>57</sup>

Fries is not committed to saying, however, that I should be judged according to whatever I may believe is my duty, no matter how I arrive at that belief. He distinguishes a person’s mere “opinion” about duty from his “conviction” about his duty. Fries thinks that a genuine moral disposition is tied to “purity”—which he identifies with the operation of an authentic *moral sentiment* (conceived according to something like the “moral sense” theories of Hutcheson and Hume). Though fallible and educable, genuine conviction must be the result of moral education, conscientious reflection, and the exercise of moral sentiments. Moral education itself, he says, occurs “not by learning rules but by the exercise of the moral sentiment.”<sup>58</sup> So Fries would not say that we must judge a person according to his opinion of what his duty is if that opinion were, for example, the result of self-deception, rationalization, or indoctrination with erroneous moral rules in a way that did not engage the person’s sincere moral reflection and moral sentiments.

## HEGEL

Fries and Hegel knew each other from the beginning of their two academic careers at Jena between 1801 and 1805. They disagreed philosophically, but throughout their careers they were also professional rivals and above all bitter

<sup>56</sup> Fries, *Neue Kritik der Vernunft*, 3:190.

<sup>57</sup> “All legal estimation of individual actions as to their dutifulness belongs only to the theory of right, and has no place in a proper theory of virtue, since this has to do only with dispositions” (Fries, *Neue Kritik der Vernunft*, 3:190).

<sup>58</sup> Fries, *Neue Kritik der Vernunft*, 3:206–7.

personal enemies. Hegel rejected Fries's empirical or 'anthropological' interpretation of Kantian transcendental philosophy as hopelessly superficial (in Hegel's vocabulary, the term *seichtig* is used more or less as a nickname for Fries). In moral philosophy, Hegel was particularly harsh in rejecting the "ethics of conviction." Some of Hegel's criticisms rest on misunderstandings (such as accusing Fries of regarding all moral views as equally correct, or ignoring the fact that certain conditions are required for there to be a genuine and pure moral 'conviction'). But no misunderstanding is involved when Hegel cites against Fries the Aristotelian argument that error about what is good and bad is not an excusing condition but rather only the sign of a vicious character. And Hegel also argues cogently when he insists that the notions like 'conscience', 'duty', and 'virtue' receive whatever justifying force they may have for individuals and their actions from the specific content of the moral convictions associated with them, and the objective truth or falsity of those convictions.

Hegel's criticisms of the 'ethics of conviction' are to be seen in terms of his basic distinction between 'morality' and 'ethical life'. 'Morality' refers to the subjective attitudes of dutifulness, conscientiousness, and good intention through which reflective agents actualize their freedom as moral subjects. 'Ethical life' refers simultaneously to a social system of institutions, roles, and expectations, and to the subjective attitude by which individuals come to identify themselves, through socialization and education, with their specific roles. One of Hegel's chief theses in moral epistemology is that the standpoint of morality is purely formal and incapable of generating the content of actual duties – which content must be supplied by the ethical life of a rational social order. (One aspect of this thesis is Hegel's famous contention that Kant's formula of universal law is empty of content and fails to distinguish good maxims from bad ones as Kant intends it to.) Yet as a result of a common but deplorable tendency to read Hegel's ethics entirely in terms of its polemical relation toward Kant, Hegel is often read as privileging 'ethical life' over 'morality', and even as attacking the standpoint of 'morality'. But this involves a serious distortion of the way Hegel conceives of both morality and ethical life.

Hegel merely follows Fichte and Fries when he regards the subjective attitude of moral dutifulness and conscientiousness, as well as the Kantian formulas, as 'formal' and incapable of generating the content of moral duties. Hegel's notion of ethical life incorporates Fichte's conception of 'particular unconditioned duties' into his conceptions of the institutions of a rational society and of the free and healthy human self as one that is subjectively in harmony with its position or role in such a society. But 'morality' is for Hegel an indispensable expression of the free reflective selfhood of individuals in the modern world, and only a modern society, in Hegel's view, can be truly rational or truly 'ethical'. Hence 'morality'

is in that sense every bit as necessary to rational ethical life as are the objective institutions of the family, civil society, and the state.

Moreover, although Hegel does not think that the content of duties can be adequately generated solely through what is given in the subjective moral attitude of individuals, there are clear indications that moral reflection, and especially the judgments of conscience, is supposed to play an indispensable role in our knowledge of what our duties are. The institutions of ethical life, and the expectations of the social roles of individuals within them, supply the objective framework for determining our duties. But Hegel thinks this framework cannot determine what an individual should do in every case; it leaves gaps and even generates conflicts. It is an indispensable function of moral conscience to resolve these problems, transforming an individual's ethical role into a moral life conscientiously lived. Hegel distinguishes merely 'formal conscience', which may be appealed to equally by an ethically dutiful and by a hypocritical individual (e.g., by a corrupt adherent of Fries's 'ethics of conviction'), from 'truthful conscience', which follows recognized ethical principles and duties. But Hegel seems willing to tolerate, or even to insist on, a greater degree of indeterminacy and ambiguity in the moral life than any of the other German philosophers we have been discussing. He sees the moral lives of individuals as caught up in contingency and accident that sometimes call into question the tenability of the attitude of pious earnestness about conscience and duty that is taken for granted by moralists such as Kant, Fichte, and Fries.

For Hegel the individual agent's knowledge of duty, which is conveyed through socialization in a rational society and takes the form of an immediate identification with one's ethical position, can be distinguished from the philosopher's knowledge of ethical life that is supposed to be arrived at in Hegel's speculative system. But Hegel insists that ethical life itself, as a subjective disposition, can take more or less reflective and more or less rational forms. He distinguishes the immediate sense of ethical identity that is the essentially ethical attitude from the higher and more reflective forms it can also take: the attitude of faith and trust, the endorsement of ethical life by rational reflection and insight from various points of view, and finally the comprehension of the rationality of ethical insight through the concept.<sup>59</sup> It is one of the characteristics of individuals in the modern world – the very characteristic that gives validity to the standpoint of morality – that they demand rational insight into themselves and the world.<sup>60</sup> In this

<sup>59</sup> *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, in G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke: Theorieerkaufgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970) [henceforth Hegel, *Werke*]. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 149.

<sup>60</sup> Hegel, *Werke*, *Philosophy of Right*, Preface.

way, philosophical comprehension of the rationality of one's social order, such as Hegel attempts in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, brings the moral standpoint to fulfillment. In this way it also completes the rationality of the ethical order itself, by bringing the subjective side of ethical life into harmony with the objective institutions at the level of explicit rational comprehension.

### LOTZE

On issues of both metaethics and moral epistemology, much more separates us from the thinking of the nineteenth century than we are likely to realize, and it is not easy to trace the path that led philosophy from where it was then to where it is now. But one neglected figure whose thought may play a significant role in the story is Hermann Lotze. Lotze's principal discussion of moral knowledge and conscience occurs in the final chapter of volume 1 of *Mikrokosmos* (1856, second volume 1858, third volume 1864), which is a comprehensive study of human nature and humanity's place in the world.<sup>61</sup> Like earlier figures in the German tradition, Lotze draws a distinction between philosophical theories of morality and the ordinary knowledge of it that is demonstrated in the conscience of the philosophically unsophisticated person. Unlike the German idealists earlier in the century, however, Lotze is skeptical of philosophical theories of morality, especially those attempting to trace moral duties back to a single rational principle.<sup>62</sup> The only philosophical account Lotze recommends is one based psychologically in the phenomenon of pleasure and displeasure, which he argues is the mark of the practical as distinct from the theoretical side of our nature.<sup>63</sup> But Lotze recognizes no notion of pleasure except one that is qualitatively determined by the kind of human good we are motivated to seek.<sup>64</sup> Hence although Lotze argues (against Kant) that pleasure and displeasure must be regarded as the necessary motivation and object of morality, he considers our pleasures must be understood as ways that "we are constrained by the inherent worth of things."<sup>65</sup>

The unsophisticated deliverances of conscience, Lotze says, are determined largely by the human being's sense of his own worth, and the pride he takes in

<sup>61</sup> Rudolf Hermann Lotze, *Mikrokosmos: Ideen zur Naturgeschichte und Geschichte der Menschheit. Versuch einer Anthropologie*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1856, 1858, 1864); *Microcosmos*, trans. Elizabeth Hamilton and E. E. Constance Jones (New York: Scribner, 1890) (cited as *Mikrokosmos*, by page or by chapter and section in vol. 1).

<sup>62</sup> *Mikrokosmos*, bk. V, chap. V, §4.

<sup>63</sup> *Mikrokosmos*, 687.

<sup>64</sup> Compare Lotze's late lectures on practical philosophy (1878), *Outlines of Practical Philosophy*, trans. George T. Ladd (Boston: Ginn, 1885), 15–22.

<sup>65</sup> *Mikrokosmos*, 695.



his own existence, which is in turn dependent on its social recognition.<sup>66</sup> Thus it follows no philosophical theory but rather a “system of traditional morality” whose content depends on the degree of historical development of the conscientious individual’s society, especially by “the notions we form of the significance of our own being, of the dignity proper to man, and of the ends which he should attain.”<sup>67</sup>

Lotze divides our conscience, however, into two parts, the first of which “speaks of our reciprocal duties” in society, the second of which “enjoins upon us to make very large claims on our existence”; this latter, “nobler morality” is “never without the co-operation of really scientific reflection,” so that there does, after all, appear to be for Lotze a distinctively philosophical element in our moral awareness.<sup>68</sup> This nobler part of our conscience derives from a “common and indestructible feature of the human mind,” which “consists in the Idea of valid and binding truth and the sense of universal right, and a universal standard by which all reality must be tried.”<sup>69</sup> Thus Lotze’s moral epistemology in *Mikrokosmos* leads us to consider his account of normative validity in general, which, however was developed only later in the second volume of his later *Logik* (1874).<sup>70</sup> This account, however, was to prove highly influential on the moral epistemology and the metaethics of the neo-Kantians and, at least indirectly, for many other philosophers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Lotze’s account of normativity proceeds by way of a highly original interpretation of Plato’s famous theory of ideas (thus giving special significance to his reference in *Mikroskosmos*, just quoted, to “the Idea of valid and binding truth” in discussing our “sense of universal right and the universal standard by which all reality must be tried”). Regarding the ‘reality’ (*Wirklichkeit*) of Plato’s forms or ideas, Lotze answers the question by drawing a threefold distinction between kinds of ‘reality’: that of an event (*Ereignis*) that occurs in time, that of something that has existence or being (*Sein*), and that of something that has validity (*Geltung*).<sup>71</sup> Platonic ideas primarily have reality only in this third sense, as norms valid for our thinking. The aim is plainly to distinguish between Plato’s theory of ideas as a theory about a metaphysical realm of special entities (which Lotze wants to reject) and as a theory about a set of normative ideals or standards (which he wants to accept). Lotze thus inaugurates that species of ‘Platonism’ in which

<sup>66</sup> *Mikrokosmos*, bk. V, chap. V, §5.

<sup>67</sup> *Mikrokosmos*, 706–7.

<sup>68</sup> *Mikrokosmos*, 712.

<sup>69</sup> *Mikrokosmos*, 713.

<sup>70</sup> Lotze, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Drei Bücher der Logik* (Leipzig, 1874); *Logic*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888) (cited as *Logic*, by page number or section number). The account of “the world of ideas” occurs in bk. III, chap. II, §§313–21.

<sup>71</sup> *Logic*, bk. III, chap. II, §316.

the normative validity of certain domains (ethical or mathematical) is contrasted with the ‘existent’ world of things and events.

Properly speaking, ‘validity’ pertains to all propositions, whether theoretical or practical in import, and indicates their correspondence to the norms governing our assent. But Lotze’s conception of validity was especially applied by later philosophers to draw a fundamental distinction between *being* (*Sein*) and *validity* (*Geltung*), creating a gulf between ‘facts’ and ‘values’, and between our cognitive access to each of these distinct realms. The realm of ideas is the realm of normative validity, as well as that of universals. “In mathematics where we find ourselves dealing not with existing things and their essence at all, in moral philosophy and jurisprudence where we speak of virtues and crimes, which *ought* or ought not to exist, more than this, when in actual life we endeavor to arrive at a decision in a matter of importance by bringing the given case under a general notion: – in all these instances we meet with the universal and its laws, in dealing with objects which are given to us as matter of knowledge though they are not things.”<sup>72</sup> Lotze also sees ideas as grounding the a priori part of our knowledge – in mathematics, in metaphysics (involving our conceptions of thing, quality, cause, and effect), and regarding the ethical ideas of good and evil.<sup>73</sup>

It is not difficult to see Lotze’s Platonism as the historical source for many views, popular among neo-Kantians (and, more recently, even among philosophers such as Habermas) that distinguish factual claims from ‘normative’ or ‘ethical’ claims (the former dealing with ‘being’, the latter with ‘validity’), as well as distinctions (such as Moore’s) between the ‘natural’ properties that pertain to matters of fact and existence and the ‘nonnatural’ properties with which ethics has to do. These views are often oriented more toward metaethics than moral epistemology, but they simultaneously impact both areas. They lead to a picture according to which what is essential to ethical knowledge is that it is divorced from what exists and what can be known empirically. Subsequent versions of these views in metaethics and moral epistemology seldom ground them in Lotze’s novel form of Platonism, but that seems to have been the first historical form in which such views came into the world.

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<sup>72</sup> *Logic*, bk. III, chap. IV, §340, 267–8.

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## ANTIMORALISM

ALLEN W. WOOD

The nineteenth century witnessed a conservative reaction against the Enlightenment and the ideals of the French Revolution, but it was also a period in which philosophical radicalism flourished in both politics and religion. Radical attacks on religion and on the foundations of the political order perhaps even invite questions about the basis of morality itself. Antimoralist stances were taken by philosophers and literary artists before the nineteenth century, such as in the works of Rabelais and Diderot. But it was not until the nineteenth century that we find systematic attacks on morality derived from central themes and theses in the philosophical tradition.

Friedrich Nietzsche is probably the best-known nineteenth-century antimoralist, but he was neither the first nor the most radical. The appeal of radical antimoralism seems to have declined in the twentieth century, perhaps due to the increasing need people felt to appeal to moral standards in opposing totalitarianism and war. To reject morality wholesale, most of us now think, is to leave ourselves in some ways defenseless against some of the worst abuses of political, economic, and military power. But traces of nineteenth-century antimoralism clearly remain in modern culture: our attitudes toward sexual morality have changed a great deal. The moralistic rhetoric we find in many older moral philosophers (e.g., in Kant) now either offends our ears or else provides opportunities for condescending humor. Terms like 'duty' and 'virtue', in today's discourse, are either suspect or ridiculous. Only social conservatives are left to express outrage (often the hypocritical outrage characteristic of traditional religious morality) at all the social tendencies they lump together under the heading of 'relativism'. Fragments of nineteenth-century antimoralism, at least, occasionally find expression in philosophy, in both the postmodernist and analytical traditions.

It is always questionable how far radical antimoralism can go without being threatened with incoherence or self-refutation, and we will see examples of this in the antimoralists we will discuss. But there is nothing inherently self-contradictory about questioning the authority morality claims over our lives and actions. The claims of morality, and of specifically moral values such as duty,

justice, or conscience, are often seen to conflict with the pursuit of pleasure or self-interest, or with nonmoral values such as aesthetic or even religious, or some conception of human flourishing that is conceived in nonmoral or antimoral terms. There is nothing incoherent on the face of it about the position that these conflicts are real, and that moral claims do not deserve to prevail in them, or even that the claims of morality should be regarded as false, bogus, or deceptive. Metaethical antirealism is sometimes an obstacle to coherently articulating antimoralist positions, at least if it takes the form of saying that the apparent assertions of morality lack truth value at all but are merely expressions of approval (or disapproval) of what morality forbids. For then attacks on morality appear to be expressions of con-attitudes directed at objects that are being characterized in terms that express only pro-attitudes. But within the Scottish moral sense theory, which is the noblest heritage that can be claimed by metaethical antirealism, moral approval was grounded not simply on “pro-attitudes” generally, but on specific sentiments with a determinate place in human psychology. There is nothing incoherent in mounting an attack against the specifically moral attitudes, perhaps providing an alternative deflationary psychology of them or subjecting them to a negative meta-attitude, such as contempt, ridicule, or (nonmoral) disapproval.

From a systematic point of view, we may divide antimoralist positions into three (nonexclusive) categories:

1. scope limitation
2. content critique
3. structural or formal critique

### *Scope Limitation*

Sometimes it is held that moral standards apply to some areas of life (such as the conduct of individuals in their private lives), but not to others (for instance, to war, or politics, or the conduct of public affairs by statesmen). Or it is held that certain individuals (such as creative artists or “great men”) are exempt from standards of morality that apply to ordinary people. These views involve radical *scope limitations* on moral standards. It would presumably not be a form of antimoralism merely to hold, as Kant does, that statesmen are subject to duties (of “right”) that are less restrictive than the (“ethical”) duties that apply to individuals. And sometimes artists or great men are thought to be answerable to standards unique to themselves. But we should regard it as antimoralistic to think that statesmen or generals need not respect anyone’s right not to be killed or coerced, or to conceive of the standards that apply to the artist or great man as extremely unconventional, permitting conduct that everyone would regard as immoral.

*Content Critique*

This is any attack on specific moral principles, standards, or duties that are regarded as basic and indispensable to morality – such as the rejection of any moral constraints at all on people's sexual behavior or the denial that feeling or showing sympathy for the weak is ever something that deserves approval or admiration. Here again, it is important to distinguish critiques of morality from mere disagreements among moralists about the right standards or principles. And there may not be any way of drawing a general, principled distinction between an immoralist and someone whose moral views are merely unconventional. But if I deny, for instance, that the strong have any duty at all to respect the rights or care about the interests of the weak, and understand this as a rejection of the basic moral principles people in my society recognize, then I would think of myself, and would rightly be thought of by others, as an antimoralist.

*Formal or Structural Critique*

The most radical form of antimoralism is one that fastens on certain concepts or sentiments that are considered basic to morality, such as the concept of rights or obligation, or feelings of blame or guilt, and provides a criticism of them that denies that they could ever be reasonable, healthy, or justified. This is what I mean by a *formal or structural critique* of morality. As I have said, the three types of antimoralism are by no means mutually exclusive. Among nineteenth-century antimoralists, they are often found in conjunction, and it even counts as a strong reason for considering certain scope limitations or content critiques as antimoralist in character that they are found in close combination with formal or structural critiques of morality.

## MARQUIS DE SADE

The earliest figure in our period who will be discussed here may also be regarded as the most radical antimoralist: Donatien Alphonse François, le Marquis de Sade (1740–1814). The philosophical significance of Sade's writings has been defended by a number of people, from Simone de Beauvoir to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno to Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan.<sup>1</sup> But there is reason to

<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, "Must We Burn Sade?" *Les Temps Modernes* 75 (1952): 197–230. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) (New York: Continuum, 1999), 81–120. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. F. Bouchard and S. Simon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977). Jacques Lacan, "Kant avec Sade," *Critique*

question this, one that points to another question about the correct boundaries of philosophical 'antimoralism'. For antimoralism does not encompass merely deliberately immoral behavior or the simple refusal to abide by moral constraints one recognizes. It concerns reasoned philosophical rejections of morality. Sade's writings are continuous with his life, in the sense that their main intent appears to be to enact immorality – which means, in the case of writings, to say things that will shock, offend, and insult the moral sensibilities of his intended audience and (we may suggest) even its author's own moral sensibilities, from whose wanton violation he derived much gratification. A philosophical defense of his position, seriously intended, might even be seen as troubling the "moral clarity" of the standards Sade shares with those he means to offend, thus interfering with his deliciously illicit pleasures.

The intent not to question morality but simply to violate it seems to apply even to the philosophical arguments Sade states or puts in the mouth of his characters. These often seem intended less as attempts to convince anyone of their conclusions than simply as a set of utterances that are themselves acts of immorality. The possibility that they are not seriously intended as arguments is strongly suggested by the flagrant inconsistencies among the positions Sade advocates. Often he defends the pursuit of self-interest, but he also attacks the conventionally virtuous (especially virtuous women) for placing self-interest ahead of the indulgence of their sexual whims and caprices.<sup>2</sup> Sade's most frequent philosophical argument is that we should satisfy our sexual desires because they were implanted in us by nature with the end that they be satisfied.<sup>3</sup> But he sometimes praises the sexual imagination for going beyond nature<sup>4</sup> and admits that both love and our moral impulses are also from nature.<sup>5</sup> But in these cases, he argues, we should thwart nature and rise above it. Sade bothers to defend even his own self-consistency only when it proves morally offensive to do so.<sup>6</sup> To offer an ostensible defense of your immoral conduct in the form of patent sophistries you obviously do not believe is not really to defend your conduct at all. It is rather only to engage in a further shameless misdeed. If this was Sade's only intent in offering his philosophical arguments, and we nevertheless take them at face value as if they were

191 (April 1963). See also Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor* (1946), trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings*, trans. R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1966). Cited as Sade, by page number.

<sup>3</sup> Sade, 165, 185, 223, 226, 248, 253.

<sup>4</sup> Sade, 232.

<sup>5</sup> Sade, 287, 318.

<sup>6</sup> Sade, 319. Sade has denied that a husband has any proprietary claim to his wife's fidelity but seems anxious to defend his self-consistency in maintaining nevertheless that every man has a right to enjoy any woman he pleases by force. In other words, the whole point of defending his self-consistency is to give himself a chance to assert that rape is justified (Sade, 319n.).

intended as serious contributions to philosophy, we are at risk of misunderstanding their intent in a manner that makes us ridiculous in Sade's eyes.<sup>7</sup>

There are worse things, however, than appearing ridiculous in the sight of fools and scoundrels. So I will pretend to take Sade's philosophical arguments as seriously meant and offer a brief summary of them, especially those presented in his set of dialogues *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795). As with much nineteenth-century antimoralism, Sade's starting point is the rejection of religion. There is obviously no God, and all teachers of religion have been rogues and charlatans whose only aim has been to enslave the human mind.<sup>8</sup> The entire morality based on religion is therefore a sham, which should be treated with contempt.

Sade's chief counterproposition, which I have already mentioned, is that our passions and desires, even (or especially) the most wanton and perverted of them, have been implanted in us by Nature, whose purpose we should serve by satisfying them. This follows (or parodies) a basic proposition in ancient ethics, that we should live according to nature. Sometimes Sade enjoys linking his views with those of Rousseau and claiming that we truly live according to nature only when we throw off the artifices of civilization, which of course include all moral constraints.<sup>9</sup> We are in any case entitled to do so by the fact that we did not ask to be "cast into this universe of woe" and can make the best of it only by "sowing a smattering of roses along the thorny path of life."<sup>10</sup> We do this best, he argues, by caring solely for our own interests and indulging our desires. "Nature has endowed each of us with a capacity for kindly feelings: let us not waste them on others."<sup>11</sup>

Not all of Sade's opinions are as morally offensive to many of us nowadays as he intended them to be. He clearly intended his advocacy of the use of condoms and other forms of birth control,<sup>12</sup> as well as his defense of the permissibility of abortion<sup>13</sup> – on the ground that a woman's body is her own<sup>14</sup> – to shock and

<sup>7</sup> We face a similar dilemma in dealing with many of the writings of postmodernist philosophers and literary theorists, who frequently seem to keep an ironic distance between themselves and anything they appear to assert or argue for. If you show them the respect of taking what they say as if they meant it, they regard you as naïve and obtuse. But if you show that you knew this all along (which of course you did), and therefore ignore their arguments altogether, treating them with the contempt they then deserve (since they were never intended to be taken seriously, hence never proposed as something deserving of intellectual respect), they take offense, as though you were not treating the authors of these patently contemptible arguments in a properly collegial manner. Perhaps the marquis de Sade was the first true postmodernist.

<sup>8</sup> Sade, 167–72, 296–307.

<sup>9</sup> Sade, 254.

<sup>10</sup> Sade, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Sade, 217.

<sup>12</sup> Sade, 230.

<sup>13</sup> Sade, 225.

<sup>14</sup> Sade, 221.



offend his contemporaries. They may still offend the backward and benighted, but most enlightened people today accept all these positions on the basis of moral standards they would ardently defend. Sade's frankness in discussing sexuality has become a commonplace since the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s (which consisted less in actual changes in people's sexual behavior than in an increased willingness to think and speak honestly about sexual matters). Sade's views on religion are shared by many of us at least in part, though we might think his estimate of it too one-sidedly negative. Many people nowadays think that it is up to us human beings to make the best we can of our condition, though the policy of self-indulgence he infers from this seems an absurd non sequitur. The idea, central to many systems of ancient ethics, that we should live according to nature seems to many of us so ambiguous in its general meaning that it might even admit of Sade's interpretation, which, however, looks more like a *reductio ad absurdum* than a confirmation of it.

It is only when Sade advocates cruelty, on the ground of the natural right of the stronger,<sup>15</sup> or puts forward his views on the proper social status of women – that their natural destiny is to enjoy being objects of sexual servitude and degradation by men<sup>16</sup> – that his assertions and arguments still have their full intended effect on us. But it is precisely here that Sade may be at his most conventional. For he is merely stating without the customary euphemisms the attitudes that spoiled members of the privileged classes (such as Sade himself) have always taken toward the entitlements of their power, and the social position in which traditional culture, morality, and religion have always placed most women. Sade's only quarrel with traditional morality is that he defends openly and shamelessly a set of social practices that moral conservatives still countenance only under the cover of prevarication, euphemism, evasion, and hypocrisy.

Sade's antimoralist arguments, if we choose to take them at face value, would fall under the heading of *content critiques* of conventional morality. They present us with a supposed conception of natural well-being or flourishing for human beings that directly contradicts the conception underlying all the standards we regard as *moral*. Sade is sometimes thought to have taken the propositions of the Enlightenment (or Rousseau) to their logical conclusion, or to have put forward a vision that properly complements the moral philosophy of Kant. Those who argue this way, however, not only grossly misrepresent the Enlightenment figures in question, but probably also misunderstand Sade's intent in a way that turns them into his fools.

<sup>15</sup> Sade, 253–5, 288, 349–67.

<sup>16</sup> Sade, 208, 219, 318–24, 345.

## G. W. F. HEGEL

In general, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) is hardly an antimoralist. He would have been shocked beyond belief by the marquis de Sade's opinions and sentiments. Hegel was even outraged by the far milder expressions of sexual liberty he found in Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* and the (anonymously penned) defense of it by Friedrich Schleiermacher.<sup>17</sup> Certainly his distinction between "ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit*) and "morality" (*Moralität*) in no sense qualifies as any kind of antimoralism. Its main point is that a full account of substantive moral norms must depend on a rational analysis of social life and cannot be derived merely from the formal conditions of individual rational agency. But Hegel's philosophy of history does involve a significant scope restriction on ethical as well as moral standards, which would prove to be influential. The great deeds of world history, and their rational justification, he says, fall outside considerations of justice, morality, or ethics.<sup>18</sup>

Hegel attempts to understand world history as a purposive process through which "spirit" (*Geist*) comes to knowledge of its own nature in the process of attempting to actualize that nature in practice. It does so through a series of stages. Each stage is represented by a determinate form of society or ethical life. Each shape of spirit strives both to understand its own concept, which it does in the realms of art, religion, and philosophy, and to actualize that concept through a system of social institutions or ethical life – supremely, in the form of the *state*.<sup>19</sup> "States, peoples and individuals involved in this concern of the world spirit emerge, each with its own particular and determinate principle, which has its interpretation and actuality in [a nation's] constitution."<sup>20</sup> But in the process of simultaneously actualizing and attempting to comprehend itself, each form of spirit begins to demand grounds for its way of life and thus comes to be aware of its limitations, which awareness subverts its way of life and drives it beyond itself.<sup>21</sup> "Right" for Hegel is the existence of the free will in the world,<sup>22</sup> and the

<sup>17</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, in *Werke: Theorieerkaufgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970). Cited as Hegel, *Werke*, by volume and paragraph number.

<sup>18</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 7, §345.

<sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte: Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1955). *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, ed. D. Forbes, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 54/47. Cited as Hegel, *Reason in History*, by German/English pagination.

<sup>20</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 7, §344.

<sup>21</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 69–73/60–3, 178–80/146–8.

<sup>22</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 7, §29.

right of world history is the highest right of all, higher even than the right of the state.<sup>23</sup>

At such a stage of transition, people cease to believe in the old form of ethical life, which decays from within, and it is necessary that a form of ethical life should be overthrown and replaced by a higher one: "This hollow structure had to be replaced by a new one."<sup>24</sup> Because for Hegel all moral and ethical standards proceed from an actual form of ethical life, the transition from one form to the next is a revolution whose rational justification falls outside ethical standards and even opposes them. "It is precisely here that there arise those great collisions between subsisting, recognized duties, laws and rights, and new possibilities which are opposed to this system, which violate it and even destroy its foundations and actuality."<sup>25</sup>

The agents of these major historical changes are what Hegel calls "world historical individuals" – men like Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon Bonaparte: "The world is still not conscious of its condition: the end is to bring this about. This is the aim of world historical human beings, and in this they find their satisfaction. They are conscious of the powerlessness of what is present, of what still coasts along but only appears to be actuality.... Spirit's self-consciousness no longer finds satisfaction in this world, but this kind of dissatisfaction has not yet found what it wills – for this is not yet affirmatively at hand – and so it stands on the negative side. It is the world historical individuals who have then told people what it is that they will."<sup>26</sup> World historical individuals are not idealists. They are men of practical insight, ambition, and, above all, *passion*. Their passions achieve the destruction of the dying ethical world precisely because "they do not heed any of the restraints which right and morality seek to impose upon them."<sup>27</sup> World historical individuals are necessarily *immoral* men, because their vocation is to overturn the very foundations of existing moral standards. "A mighty figure must trample many an innocent flower underfoot, and destroy much that lies in its path."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, since the right of world history is higher than that of morality or ethical life, "no claims must be raised against world historical deeds and their perpetrators by moral circles, to which they do not belong. The litany of private virtues – modesty, humility, charity and temperance – must not be raised against them."<sup>29</sup> Moral and ethical standards simply do not apply to great men, whose crimes both transcend and overturn them.

<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 7, §§33, 340.

<sup>24</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 105/89.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 96–7/82.

<sup>26</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 98–9/84.

<sup>27</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 79/68.

<sup>28</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 105/89.

<sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 171–2/141.

Yet this apparently radical conclusion needs to be qualified and clarified in some important ways. Hegel does not think that world historical individuals can ever clearly understand the meaning of their deeds: "Since these individuals are the living expressions of the substantial deed of the world spirit and are thus immediately identical with it, they cannot themselves perceive it and it is not their object or end."<sup>30</sup> There is no question, therefore, of their availing themselves in their own minds of a "supramoral justification" for what they do. From their own standpoint, therefore, world historical individuals can never be anything but ambitious evildoers and criminals – a fact that does not disturb them, because they are driven by passions too powerful to respect any moral or ethical standards. (From the mere fact that Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov bothered to care about whether he had such a justification, he could have known already that he was not the sort of person whose deeds could ever have it.) And eventually world historical individuals also typically receive punishment for their crimes, a fact for which Hegel shows no regret: "When their end is attained, they fall aside like empty husks ... they die early like Alexander, are murdered like Caesar, or deported like Napoleon."<sup>31</sup> It is "the cunning of reason" that "it sets passions to work in its service, so that the agents by which it gives itself existence must pay the penalty and suffer the loss."<sup>32</sup>

The scope restrictions Hegel's philosophy of history places on morality are therefore never available as supramoral justification to the actors themselves. They apply only to the philosophical historian, who comes along later to look rationally at history and is the one to whom history looks rationally back. Thus when moralists inappropriately focus attention on the immorality of world historical individuals, it is not these individuals who Hegel thinks are wronged. The harm instead is only to our rational comprehension of history, which is obscured or distorted by moral irrelevancies. Thus if Sade's antimoralism disqualifies itself because it is not a seriously argued position but simply part of the practice of immorality, Hegel's remains dubious because it applies only to the theoretical comprehension of evil deeds and never takes a form that permits evildoers to avail themselves of it.

#### MAX STIRNER

Probably the most authentic and most radical nineteenth-century immoralist was Johann Caspar Schmidt (1806–56), better known by his pen name *Max*

<sup>30</sup> Hegel, *Werke* 7, §348.

<sup>31</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 100/85.

<sup>32</sup> Hegel, *Reason in History*, 105/89.

*Stirner* (based on a childhood nickname, given him on account of his large forehead). Stirner studied in Berlin, with Hegel, Schleiermacher, Marheineke, and Michelet. He associated with the “Young Hegelian” group that called itself *die Freien*, which included Bruno and Edgar Bauer, Arnold Ruge, and Friedrich Engels (Stirner apparently never knew Karl Marx personally). Like that of the other Young Hegelians, his thought originates in the impulse to be liberated from socially imposed illusions, especially religious ones. But whereas the other Young Hegelians were politically on the far Left, favoring communitarianism or even communism, Stirner regarded their moral and political ideals as merely another form of what he called ‘hierarchy’ – a term that to him merely began with the notion of ‘priestly rule’ and included all forms of illusion that threaten the unbridled freedom of individuals over their own lives.<sup>33</sup> “Hierarchy is the dominion of thoughts [*Gedankenherrschaft*].”<sup>34</sup>

Stirner’s principal thoughts were published late in 1844 in his chief work, *Das Einzige und seine Eigentum*. In order to complete it, he left his only secure employment (teaching literature at a respectable Berlin school for girls) and lived the rest of his life in increasing poverty. It is divided into two main parts: the first is a critique of past history and its religious, moral, and social ideals; the second is a development of Stirner’s conception of authentic “ownness” or “property” (*Eigentum*) and the genuinely free or “egoistic” mode of life that goes with it.

The ancient world, according to Stirner, was dominated by a servitude to “reality,” “nature,” to what is thinglike or existent – an existing way of life, a “human nature” that dictates how we should live.<sup>35</sup> Like Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Stirner sees ancient skepticism as the transitional mode of thought, leading to the modern dominion of what is unreal, ideal, or spiritual.<sup>36</sup> Stirner sees no difference in principle between submitting yourself to a religious ideal of self-denial and the “self-denial” (*Selbstverleugnung*) involved in submitting to a “moral law,” or “reason” or “spiritual freedom,” or “ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*), or a good social “cause,” or an ideal of “humanity” or “the human vocation” or “human flourishing,” since all these equally represent an alien abstraction, a set of thoughts understood as “sacred,” that bind and limit you.<sup>37</sup> “Alienness is a criterion of the sacred.... What is sacred to me is not my own.”<sup>38</sup> The sacred is the realm of “spooks” (*Spuk*). All “essences” – abstract conceptions of “the will” or

<sup>33</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, trans. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 47, 62. Cited as Stirner, by page number.

<sup>34</sup> Stirner, 68.

<sup>35</sup> Stirner, 19–27.

<sup>36</sup> Stirner, 27–35.

<sup>37</sup> Stirner, 13–18, 56, 46, 35, 54, 30, 75, 21, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Stirner, 38.

“human nature” – fall under this heading.<sup>39</sup> To live under the authority of spooks is to “have one sail too many” (*einen Sparen zuviel*),<sup>40</sup> or to be under the sway of an *idée fixe*.<sup>41</sup>

Moral standards of all kinds belong to the category of hierarchy. Stirner expresses contempt for traditional sexual morality,<sup>42</sup> denouncing the whole idea of “chastity” and the family as an institution,<sup>43</sup> along with property, the state, and anything else that people consider “sacred.”<sup>44</sup> “Conscience” is a “spy and eavesdropper” on your thoughts.<sup>45</sup> Those “liberals,” who think of themselves as “the free,” are as much under the sway of hierarchy as conservatives, since their ideals of the “free state” or the “rights of man” are all pretexts for suppressing the individual in the name of something higher.<sup>46</sup> Socialism or communism likewise represents the suppression of the individual in the name of the collective.<sup>47</sup>

The traditional English translation of the title of Stirner’s book is *The Ego and Its Own*. This accurately conveys the fact that Stirner regards his own position as “egoism,” and his chief (indeed, his only) concern is to secure for the individual self what properly belongs to it, its “self-enjoyment” (*Selbstgenuß*).<sup>48</sup> But the term ‘*Einzig*’ really means ‘unique’ or ‘singular’, and this is the key to what is most radical in Stirner’s position.

We can understand Stirner’s antimoralism as a development to the utmost extreme of one way in which the Kantian conception of moral autonomy was understood in the early nineteenth century. For Kant, the moral law is grounded in the nature of things, in particular, in the nature of the rational will. Literally speaking, the moral law has no author or legislator, since its validity depends on no legislative act by any will, whether divine or human. But each of us may also consider ourselves as the author of the moral law, insofar as we fulfill our rational vocation by obeying the moral law, and in that sense our obedience to it is obedience to our own most authentic will. Likewise, God may be regarded as commanding its duties, insofar as he recognizes their inherent rightness, and as its

<sup>39</sup> Stirner, 40.

<sup>40</sup> The German exclamation *Du hast einen Sparen zuviel*, means “you are crazy” (cf. the English expressions “you have a screw loose,” “you aren’t playing with a full deck,” or [in Leopold’s translation], “you have wheels in your head”). But Stirner’s use of the German expression is perhaps meant to imply that you have some idea that is (like an extra sail on a boat) taking you crazily off course, putting your life out of (your own) control.

<sup>41</sup> Stirner, 43.

<sup>42</sup> Stirner, 53–4.

<sup>43</sup> Stirner, 195–6.

<sup>44</sup> Stirner, 66–7.

<sup>45</sup> Stirner, 81.

<sup>46</sup> Stirner, 89–100.

<sup>47</sup> Stirner, 102–11.

<sup>48</sup> Stirner, 282.

legislator, insofar as he can be seen as apportioning happiness according to moral worthiness.

Among the German Romantics, however, the idea of Kantian autonomy was interpreted (or misinterpreted) as the idea that the moral law receives its content solely from my having willed just that content. The Romantics also championed the idea that each of us is a unique individual, unlike any other, so that no generalization can ever adequately capture what is authentic to me. This naturally gave rise to the thought that morality properly has no universal or objective content, but what is right for each individual is what expresses that individual's unique individuality. Stirner merely carried this insight one step further, turning it into what I have called a formal or structural critique of morality, by arguing the very ideas of duty, moral law, every ideal or norm, even the apparently personal authority of individual conscience, involves something standing over the individual, accepted as authoritative. The only true autonomy, therefore, is the completely antinomian position of egoism: "I am my own species, without norm, without law, without model, and the like. It is possible that I can make very little out of myself; but this little is everything, and is better than what I allow to be made out of me by the might of others, by the training of custom, religion, the laws, the state" (Stirner, 164). "Every I is from birth a criminal against the people and the state,"<sup>49</sup> and "Every people, every state, is unjust toward the egoist."<sup>50</sup> My rights extend only as far as my own power.<sup>51</sup> *Might is right* – and the only right there is. Any other right is *ein Sparen zuviel*.<sup>52</sup> I value all things, and even all other people, only insofar as they may be regarded as my property, means to my self-enjoyment.<sup>53</sup> Nothing and no one is an object of *respect* for me.<sup>54</sup> No one has any rights or any claims against me.<sup>55</sup> For me, I am free of all claims by others, all rights are my own, and all property is mine: "I am the owner of humanity, am humanity, and do nothing for the good of another humanity."<sup>56</sup>

Stirner's position might seem to exclude all relationships between people, but in a section entitled "My Intercourse" (*Mein Verkehr*), Stirner attempts to deny this, by describing how an egoist must regard his relations with others. An egoist, he says, can love others: "I love human beings too, not merely individuals, but every one. But I love them with the consciousness of egoism: I love them because love makes *me* happy. I love because loving is natural to me, because it pleases

<sup>49</sup> Stirner, 179.

<sup>50</sup> Stirner, 192.

<sup>51</sup> Stirner, 169–70, 187–8, 227.

<sup>52</sup> Stirner, 187.

<sup>53</sup> Stirner, 236, 271, 275.

<sup>54</sup> Stirner, 246, 276.

<sup>55</sup> Stirner, 219.

<sup>56</sup> Stirner, 218.

me.”<sup>57</sup> But this, he argues, does exclude “unselfish, mystical, romantic love” or “rational love” (like that of Feuerbach, which is based on a “belief” in others).<sup>58</sup> An egoist can join a party, “but cannot let himself be embraced and taken up by the party. For him the party remains all the time nothing but a gathering: he is one of the party, he takes part (*nimmt ... teil*).”<sup>59</sup> A society of egoists is possible, but only one that is freely chosen by each: “There is a difference whether my liberty or my ownness is limited by a society. If the former only is the case, it is a coalition, an agreement, a union [and this is possible for egoists]; but if ruin is threatened to ownness, it is a *power of itself*, a power *above me* [and then] it exists by my *resignation*, my *self-denial*.”<sup>60</sup>

An egoist can even be a kind of social rebel or revolutionary, but the egoist’s mode of action must not be “revolution” but “insurrection” (*Empörung*):

‘Revolution’ and ‘insurrection’ must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in overturning conditions, of the established order or *status*, the state or society, and is accordingly a *political* or *social* act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from human beings’ discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up, without regard to the arrangements that spring from it. The revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves.... Revolution commands one to make arrangements, insurrection demands that one rise or exalt himself [*sich auf oder emporzurichten*].<sup>61</sup>

At times it seems as if Stirner’s egoistic “insurrection” is something that happens only inside the egoist’s head. The egoist may go on living with others as before but merely chooses to regard his relations with them in a new (amoral, nonsacred, egoistic) way. At other times, Stirner seems to be trying to live the same way with others, while undercutting the conditions of living that way. Would anyone enter into a love relation with someone whose only interest in him is selfish? Would a party or a society willingly accept a member who refuses to recognize any ties of loyalty or authority? Would anyone at all choose to enter into relations with a person who respects nothing and no one, who can value others at all only by regarding them as his own property? These reflections must lead us to ask whether the ruthless consistency of Stirner’s Romantic interpretation of autonomy has not led him into a position that is self-undermining or even self-inconsistent.

<sup>57</sup> Stirner, 258.

<sup>58</sup> Stirner, 259, 261.

<sup>59</sup> Stirner, 211.

<sup>60</sup> Stirner, 272.

<sup>61</sup> Stirner, 279–80.



There are analogous worries regarding Stirner's conceptions of "egoism" and "self-enjoyment." *Egoism* usually connotes a concern with one's own self-interest, which means a concern about one's future and one's happiness or flourishing in that future. But Stirner is perceptive enough to see that this concern leads inevitably to hierarchy and spooks, to another form of the "sail too many." For any conception of one's self-interest that encompasses the whole of one's future is really nothing but a kind of norm or law, which undermines the uniqueness of the unique and involves submission to a kind of authority. Maintaining a conception of one's overall well-being is only another way of imposing on oneself an ideal of humanity or human flourishing. And caring about one's future self for its own sake is not so different from caring about other selves for their own sake. Stirner is probably right to think that if we let ourselves do the former, it would be arbitrary to stop there. He therefore confines his self-enjoyment to the present only: "The true human being does not lie in the future, an object of longing, but lies, existent and real in the present."<sup>62</sup> But one can then ask whether "egoism" or "self-enjoyment" has any determinate content without any notion of total or long-term self-interest to specify the egoist's aims. If "egoism" dissolves into the "self-enjoyment" of a temporally dimensionless self-absorption entirely in the present, then it no longer has any determinate content, and not even any way of distinguishing itself from altruism (for in the present moment, I might derive a kind of self-enjoyment from helping another for the other's own sake and at the sacrifice of my future self-interest). Antimoralism in general is not an incoherent position, but Stirner's form of it is certainly threatened with several different kinds of incoherence.

Stirner himself was a sad and pitiful human being, whose life was little more than a series of disastrous misfortunes. His father died when he was still an infant, and his young adulthood was plagued by his mother's increasing insanity. His first wife died bearing their stillborn first child. Stirner's second wife, Marie Dähnhardt, the love of his life, the "my sweetheart" to whom he dedicated *Das Einzige und seine Eigentum*, left him a year before its publication and later said that she had neither respected nor loved him. As I have already mentioned, he surrendered his economic security for the sake of completing his book, which was attacked by some of his closest philosophical allies, but (in a time of very severe censorship and repression of all radical ideas) was ignored by the authorities, who thought its ideas too insane to pose any threat to public order. In his late forties, Stirner was imprisoned for unpaid debts, and at age fifty he died in great pain from an infected insect bite. However the notion might be defined, it is difficult

<sup>62</sup> Stirner, 289.

to imagine him ever experiencing much of the “self-enjoyment” to which his egoistic philosophy was so single-mindedly dedicated.

#### KARL MARX

The social and historical theory articulated in *Capital* (first volume, 1867) strikes many people even today as a highly cogent indictment of the capitalist system as fundamentally unjust, oppressive to the working class, and irreconcilable with such values as human dignity. My own view is that while we are quite justified in thinking that no viable alternative to it has yet been devised, Marx’s critique of capitalism as a brutal, irrational, and exploitative social system still holds today; anyone who thinks capitalism an acceptable mode of economic life has to be either out of touch with reality or completely lacking in any moral sensibilities, or else living in a profound state of denial and self-deception in one or both of these respects.

It is therefore difficult for people like me to accept the fact that Karl Marx (1818–83) did not understand his theory of capitalism as supporting any indictment of it on grounds of morality or justice. But this is nevertheless a fact, and those who would deny it are simply ignoring the plain evidence about what Marx thought and wrote. Marx belongs to the antimoralist tradition in nineteenth-century thought. He understood his materialist conception of history as underwriting a deflationary conception of distributive justice according to which capitalist distribution is unquestionably just, but its justice constitutes no rational defense of it. And Marx consistently and vigorously attacked all working-class revolutionaries who proposed to criticize capitalism on moral grounds or grounds of injustice.

This perplexing situation can best be made comprehensible by understanding the ways Marx was influenced by the last two thinkers we have been discussing: Hegel and Stirner. Marx follows Hegel in thinking of human history as consisting of stages, each with its own mode of ethical life, with tumultuous periods of revolutionary transition between them. In Marx’s case, the stages are fundamentally constituted by “modes of production,” consisting of a determinate set of “production relations” corresponding to the stage of development of their “productive powers.” “The totality of these production relations forms the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juristic and political superstructure arises, and to which determinate forms of social consciousness correspond.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx Engels Werke*, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (Berlin: Dietz, 1956–90), 13:8; cited as Marx, MEW, by volume and page number. *Marx-Engels Selected Works* (in one volume) (New York: International, 1968), 182–3; cited as SW, by page number.

Right and ethics are part of the superstructure, and ideas about them are forms of social consciousness – which, when they serve the interests of a social class, masking these interests by treating them as impartial or objective standards, can also be called forms of “ideology.” The applicable standards of right, morality, or ethics in any historical situation are those that represent what is functional for a given mode of production.

The justice of transactions which go on between agents of production rests on the fact that these transactions arise out of the production relations as their natural consequences. The juristic forms in which these economic transactions appear as voluntary actions of the participants, as expressions of their common will or as contracts that may be enforced by the state against a single party, cannot, being mere forms, determine this content. They only express it. The content is just whenever it corresponds to the mode of production, is adequate to it. It is unjust whenever it contradicts it.<sup>64</sup>

For this reason, when the Gotha Program demands “a just distribution of the proceeds of labor,” Marx comments contemptuously with the following series of rhetorical questions: “Do not the bourgeois assert that the present distribution is just? And isn’t in fact the only just distribution based on the present mode of production? Are economic relations ruled by juridical concepts, or do not, on the contrary, juridical relations arise out of economic ones?”<sup>65</sup> On Marx’s view, because juridical relations are the mere expressions of economic relations, and the justice of a system of distribution consists in nothing but its correspondence to the economic relations of the prevailing mode of production, the bourgeois are entirely correct in declaring the present system of distribution to be just. Marx regards this system as brutal, inhuman, exploitative, and utterly intolerable for the vast majority, but not as unjust.

As for Hegel, for Marx revolutionary changes involve the destruction, hence the violation, of the standards applicable to the stage that is being overturned. Unlike Hegel, Marx thinks agents of revolution can comprehend the historical process in which they are involved, but he shares with Hegel the view that we cannot anticipate the historical future. This is why Marx refuses to provide “recipes for the cook-shops of the future,” declares that communists have “no ideals to realize,” and refuses to provide any but the most vague and uninformative remarks about what future socialist or communist society will be like.<sup>66</sup> Marx agrees with Hegel that in relation to prevailing ethical standards, revolutionary activity will always count as unjust and immoral. This is why the *Communist Manifesto* says that

<sup>64</sup> Marx, MEW 25:351–2.

<sup>65</sup> Marx, MEW 19:18, Marx, SW 321–2.

<sup>66</sup> Marx, MEW 23:25, Marx, MEW 1:344. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975–), 3:142; cited as Marx, CW, by volume and page number. Marx, MEW 3:55, Marx, CW 5:49; Marx, MEW 17:343, Marx, SW 294–5.

communism will involve “despotic encroachments on rights of property” and dismisses moral questions entirely with the remark that “laws, morality, religion are only so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which hide just as many bourgeois interests.”<sup>67</sup> In history, he says, “it is always the bad side that finally triumphs over the good side. For the bad side is the one which brings the movement to life, which makes history by bringing the struggle to fruition.”<sup>68</sup>

We would also do well not to ignore the influence of Max Stirner. It is true that in the (unpublished) *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels devote many pages of (often tedious) polemic to Stirner’s individualism, denouncing it as not as radical as it sounds, and merely a petty bourgeois ideology. But Marx’s antimoralism is nearly as radical as Stirner’s and seems motivated by many of the same considerations. The term “dominion of thoughts” (*Gedankenherrschaft*) that Stirner uses to characterize “hierarchy”<sup>69</sup> is taken over by Marx and Engels as their characterization of the essential standpoint of all “ideology.”<sup>70</sup>

The Marxian use of Stirner’s term also involves a *critique* of Stirner (along with the other Young Hegelians). For “ideology” is not only (or even primarily) letting oneself be ruled by thoughts; ideology is rather the *belief* in the dominion of thoughts – the belief, for instance, that when you are subject to religious or moral illusions, it is fundamentally religious or moral *thoughts* that have dominion over you – and this belief is clearly central to Stirner’s entire antimoralist program. Marx maintains, however, that the dominion of thoughts is only a mystified form in which people are being ruled by social relations. Stirner, like the other Young Hegelians, thinks he can liberate himself merely by thinking a different way, whereas human emancipation involves fundamentally a change in social and economic practice, and liberation from thoughts will follow from this.

Given our own almost irresistible tendency to interpret Marx’s critique of capitalism in terms of justice or morality, it is worth asking how Marx himself interpreted it, and whether any coherent antimoralist construal of it is even possible. (For I think the view that it is not always possible lies behind the views of those who refuse to accept the plain textual fact that Marx not only did not object to capitalism on moral grounds but condemned those who did.)

I have sometimes argued that Marx’s critique of capitalism rests on an appeal to *nonmoral* values, such as human flourishing and a free mode of life.<sup>71</sup> I think this must be true, as far as it goes, but it may not go deep enough. For nonmoral values might still function socially and ideologically in the way that moral values do, and

<sup>67</sup> Marx, MEW 4:42, Marx, CW 6:494–5.

<sup>68</sup> Marx, MEW 1:140, Marx, CW 6:174.

<sup>69</sup> Stirner, 68.

<sup>70</sup> Marx, MEW 3:14, Marx, CW 5:24.

<sup>71</sup> See Allen Wood, *Karl Marx*, 2nd ed. (London: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 151–5.

Marx would then have exactly the same objection to them as he does to morality. So we must try harder to say what his most basic objection is. I think it turns out to be rather like Stirner's.

Morality may be thought of in various ways – for instance, proponents of “virtue ethics” tend to think of it as a way of appraising human character traits, and the more Scottishly inclined of them think of it as a system of sentiments or feelings that underlie both these appraisals and the motivation of human behavior. I think that Marx, like the Young Hegelians more generally, thinks about morality more in the way we Kantians think about it: moral values and standards are basically a set of concepts and norms, having universal validity, that are involved in rationally regulating our own behavior, especially with a view to our membership in a rationally regulated social system satisfying universal human interests (the “realm of ends”). But the most radical of the Young Hegelians, namely, Stirner and Marx, do not think that regulating our behavior by a system of thoughts and norms is compatible with living freely as fully developed human beings. “Universal” standards always come from outside the individuals whose lives they are to regulate and are hostile to their interests. Their conclusion, drawn with perfect consistency from these premises, was that social life must not be grounded on anything like moral standards, and free individuals should never be bound by them.

Marx has special reasons for resisting morality insofar as the thoughts that regulate our behavior derive from oppressive social systems or from class ideologies (even including those of historically progressive classes, such as the proletariat), whose function is to mystify the thinking of people by representing some class interest as the universal human interest. His view is that anything like the notion of a “universal human interest” will first begin to refer to something only after classes have been abolished, and the whole opposition of the individual's interest to some collective or social interest no longer exists. At that point, of course, the “universal interest” will no longer have the function of normatively constraining individuals to act in opposition to their individual interests, and so there will no longer be any point at all in talking about “universal human interests” at all. And it will be only at that point that a truly free or human mode of life will begin to be possible for people. So as long as social conditions exist that give a point to a moral way of thinking, the moral way of thinking will be a form of ideology, from which clear-sighted human beings will naturally try to liberate themselves.

This whole way of looking at things may strike many of us as hopelessly utopian, even bordering on incoherence. But without trying to decide whether we are right about this, and how we should interpret Marx's critique of capitalism if we are, I think this is pretty clearly the way Marx himself saw the matter.

## FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The most famous nineteenth-century antimoralist is undoubtedly Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). But there are major difficulties in discussing Nietzsche's views on this, as on many other topics. For one thing, alongside Nietzsche's emphatic and seemingly unqualified antimoralistic pronouncements there is also praise for such moral phenomena as conscience, for moral codes (certain of them, anyway), as well as apparent expressions of indignation that are difficult to interpret in a way that is not moral. More generally, Nietzsche cultivates a method of saying what he means that usually involves never (or never quite) meaning what he says. If it is possible to read him as expressing a self-consistent position at all, such a reading requires great subtlety of interpretation and frequent abstention from any natural way of taking his pronouncements. There are also suggestions throughout his writings that especially when it comes to value pronouncements, he treats all of them antirealistically, as merely expressing his own standpoint, or intends them to apply only to an audience of a few superior individuals (like himself).

A sensible person might conclude from this last point that Nietzsche should be read only by that tiny minority of arrogant fools for whom his works were intended, and the rest of us should simply leave them alone. But in Nietzsche's writings there are also a number of profound, provocative, and even brilliant arguments and psychological analyses, from whose insight even those of us in the lowing herd obviously stand to profit.<sup>72</sup> So I suggest that the right way to look at Nietzsche's antimoralism is to consider some of these arguments and analyses on their own, without asking whether or how they fit together into a coherent position, or from what elite point of view they might perhaps be made comprehensible as a whole.

Nietzsche's works contain critiques of morality that fall into all three of the categories we have distinguished. Sometimes Nietzsche suggests that moral constraints and valuations that might apply to ordinary people should not bind the "higher man." There are also less aggressively elitist versions of scope restrictions in Nietzsche's treatment of morality, such as the idea that different people require different moral values in order to flourish, and hence that any moral code presenting itself as universally valid will be harmful to many people.

<sup>72</sup> Isn't it strange that the followers of all elitist Pied Pipers, whether of Nietzsche, or Leo Strauss, or Ayn Rand, always account themselves among the superior few? But then very few Calvinists regard themselves as part of the vast majority of corrupt humanity who have been predestined from all eternity to reprobation and eternal damnation. And no one who believes there is a "chosen people of God" thinks that God has selected any but his own nation as the one on which to bestow his blessing.

Perhaps the most eye-catching part of Nietzsche's antimoralism, however, are his content critiques of Christian morality and the modern Enlightenment morality he regards as a mere continuation of it. The most striking aspect of Nietzsche's account is the depiction of Christian morality as a morality of "good vs. evil," a "slave morality," motivated by envy, revenge, and hatred against the pagan aristocracy, with its "master morality of 'good vs. bad.'"<sup>73</sup> The narrative is a retelling (with several ironic twists) of standard modern narratives about the decline of antiquity and the rise of Christian culture. It accepts the standard picture that ancient paganism was more natural and more naïve than the Christian culture that conquered it, but less profound, and also that the victory of Christianity over paganism was inevitable. It also appropriates the Hegelian master-servant narrative. But in Nietzsche's retelling, the irresistible power of the Christian worldview is transformed into the subversion and destruction of beautiful innocence by rancorous cunning.

There are several prominent sides of Christian and modern morality that Nietzsche subjects to content critique. One is its democratic or egalitarian side, which Nietzsche attacks as Callicles did in Plato's *Gorgias*, arguing that it is no more than a self-protective ruse through which those who are too weak to dominate attempt to protect themselves from their natural superiors. Another is the value placed on selflessness and compassion, which Nietzsche always sees through the lens of Schopenhauer's exaltation of them as the essence of morality. Part of Nietzsche's critique is based on the idea (which is also derived from Schopenhauer and may be more controversial than we easily appreciate when reading his texts) that the weak are condemned by their nature to the misery they suffer, so that the pity of the strong is powerless to better their condition but has only the effect of dragging down the strong themselves.

In all Nietzsche's applications of his "will to power" doctrine to the criticism of morality, it is unclear how he understands his assertions of the superior value of strength over weakness. On one reading, the unequal value of different people is objective, arising from the nature of things (from the essence of the world as will to power). On another reading, which seems more consistent with Nietzsche's regular denial that there is any such thing as "objective" value, his own value preference for the strong over the weak and his consequent rejection of both egalitarianism and compassion are merely personal preferences, perhaps conducive to the flourishing of the "strong" type he takes himself to exemplify – and in that

<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, First Essay. Nietzsche's writings will be cited here by title (or abbreviated title, such as *Genealogy* for *On the Genealogy of Morals*), any necessary subtitles, and aphorism number. All German works can be found in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

case his self-valuation, and his valuation of what is conducive to his own type, would be equally only a subjective preference on his part.

It is difficult (in the end, I think impossible) to decide between these two readings on textual grounds. What is worse, even Nietzsche's attempts to argue for his position seem to trade illicitly on the ambiguity. Unless the positive valuation of "strength" that underlies the rhetoric of his attack on Christian and modern morality has some basis other than personal preference, there seems no reason why anyone's mind should be changed by Nietzsche's attempt at a "revaluation of values." But whenever Nietzsche senses a challenge to the "objectivity" of his value preferences, his strong tendency to skepticism about both metaphysics and value tends to take over – he abandons all claims about reality or objectivity and treats everything he has been saying as merely an expression of his own perspective – which, however, he still wants us to accept as one representing a kind of "strength" that should call forth our admiration – unless, that is, our tastes have been corrupted by Christian-modern decadence. But that metajudgment about our tastes is apparently once again only an expression of Nietzsche's personal perspective, so there seems, by his own admission, nothing left but his own self-serving manipulative rhetoric that could convert someone with Christian or modern moral sensibilities.

There are in Nietzsche several types of formal or structural critiques of morality. One is the metaethically antirealist thesis that morality presupposes entities, properties, truths, and states of affairs that do not exist. "*There are altogether no moral facts.* Moral judgments agree with religious ones in believing in realities that are no realities. Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena – more precisely, a misinterpretation."<sup>74</sup> Nietzsche very consequently (unlike most metaethical antirealists in the analytical tradition) seems to regard this as radically discrediting morality as a whole.<sup>75</sup> Another fundamental and related structural critique is involved in Nietzsche's denial of free will,<sup>76</sup> which he regards as discrediting not only all concepts of moral responsibility and blame, but even the very notion of "ought":

Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types ... – and some wretched loafer of a moralist comments: "No! Man ought to be different!" [In so doing,] he does not cease

<sup>74</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight*, "Improvers of Mankind," 1, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Viking Press, 1954) [cited as PN], 501.

<sup>75</sup> But Nietzsche is not entirely consistent about this, because at times he argues that falsity is not necessarily an argument against a judgment, since (he claims) false judgments may sometimes be a necessary condition for flourishing or even for life (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 4). This curious view might consistently allow for us to approve of false judgments made by others, if we think their living and flourishing to be worthy of approval, but it is hard to see how it could apply to our own false judgments, however much they may promote our life and flourishing.

<sup>76</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight*, "Four Great Errors," 7, PN 499–501.



to make himself ridiculous. The single human being is a piece of *fatum* from the front and from the rear, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be. To say to him, "Change yourself!" is to demand that everything be changed, even retroactively.<sup>77</sup>

Nietzsche's most original and interesting formal or structural critiques of morality, however, involve psychological analyses of some fundamental moral concepts and emotions, such as blame and guilt. The critique of slave morality involves not only a content critique of Christian morality, but also a deflationary psychological account of all moral emotions involving blame or indignation, one that makes use of the notion of *ressentiment*.

In a broad sense, '*ressentiment*' refers to any reactive impulse felt by someone who feels injured or encroached upon by another.<sup>78</sup> But Nietzsche subsequently narrows his usage, so that it refers to the result of a special psychic mechanism involving repression and redirection: "the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge."<sup>79</sup> In Nietzsche's theory, in the "master" system of values, "good" expresses the triumphant pleasure the superior nature feels in itself, and "bad" refers to those inferiors (to whose number the aristocrat is happy he does not belong).

By contrast, according to the "slave" system of values, moral "evil" (*Böse*) is the imaginary object of impotent and redirected *ressentiment*, and moral "good" is its opposite – in effect, referring to those natures that are too weak to violate or encroach upon anything. At the same time, Nietzsche's theory explains why moral emotions such as blame and indignation have a kind of impersonal or impartial character. Their object is not the particular "evildoer" who has encroached on me, but the imaginary object of whom any particular wrongdoer is at most one example. Thus there is nothing personal or partial in blame – it hates only the "sin" and not the "sinner." Or rather, as Nietzsche wants us to see, it is intensely personal from the standpoint of the one who feels it, releasing all the pent-up frustrations and vengeful feelings of a thousand invasions and indignities I was unable effectively to repel. But the vengeful feelings expressed by moral blame and indignation have been repressed through consciousness of my impotence. They have been repressed, transformed, and often redirected perhaps at an object weak enough that I can now afford to express them. Nietzsche's theory

<sup>77</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight*, "Morality as Anti-Nature," 6, PN 491. Nietzsche does not explain how this could possibly be made consistent with his own evident intention to change the minds of his readers, sometimes quite radically, about many subjects, including morality.

<sup>78</sup> This term means something like "resentment," but Nietzsche passes over the standard German words for it (such as *Ärger* or *Zorn*) in favor of this French word, because its etymology implies that it is a *reactive* feeling, a negative response to some positive encroachment from outside, which is precisely the connotation Nietzsche needs for his theory.

<sup>79</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, First Essay, 10.

can thus explain why many people are morally outraged at poor welfare mothers but not at the wealthy who dominate and exploit them. If the theory is accepted, it also forces us to see indignation as an essentially self-opaque emotion, one we could never rationally endorse while understanding why we feel it.

The Second Essay of the *Genealogy of Morals* presents a similarly subversive theory, involving a structural or formal critique of morality, regarding the morally indispensable feelings of guilt and bad conscience. Nietzsche's theory, which anticipates the main substance of what Freud was later to say in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, is based on the idea that the historical origins of all morality lie in the way the customs of a society exercise control and constraint over its individual members. Nietzsche calls this social regimen the "morality of mores" (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*). The mores of the community frustrate many of the individual's instincts, especially the aggressive ones, since the natural expression of these instincts would harm others and make for an insecure world in which an orderly and secure social life, in which the progress of civilization is possible, would be impossible. But the powerful psychological needs represented by these instincts do not go away just because they are socially repressed. Instead, as in the case of *ressentiment*, they must be transformed and redirected, assuming a form that is acceptable both to the psyche of the individual and to the social mores. The mores are designed, in relation to my aggressive instincts, to protect *others* from them, but they are unconcerned with whether these instincts do harm to *me*. Therefore, the only acceptable object on which they may inflict suffering is *myself*. Civilized human beings, therefore, have a need to make themselves suffer, as Nietzsche puts it, "out of a joy in making suffer."<sup>80</sup>

This infliction of suffering, however, would be psychologically untenable if the individual were conscious of it for what it is (it might then produce resentful feelings against the mores and other people, with disastrous consequences for society, and especially for the individual). It must therefore appear to the individual in a disguised form, as something other than what it is. We must be able to tell ourselves a convincing lie about why we are inflicting suffering on ourselves.

Nietzsche locates the origins of this lie in the ancient practices of punishment, which were (at that time) closely associated with relations between creditor and debtor in ancient times. (Nietzsche here seems to be thinking especially about certain provisions in the Roman Twelve Tables.) If a debtor could not pay his creditor, the creditor was permitted to inflict pain or injury on the debtor in proportion to the size of the debt. (Nietzsche emphasizes that there need be nothing voluntary about the inability to pay, and the infliction of pain was not necessarily thought of as an incentive for the debtor to pay his debts. The point

<sup>80</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Essay, 18.

was rather that in that more innocent time, people frankly acknowledged that it is desirable to be able to make another suffer, and this provides the unpaid creditor with a substitute compensation that made up for the unpaid debt.) By analogy, those who violated the mores or laws of society were treated as debtors, and punishment for their crimes was interpreted as society's entitlement to make them suffer in compensation.

As a psychological story about the redirection and inward turning of our aggressive instincts, we think of our self-inflicted suffering as punishment (or the payment of a debt). This, Nietzsche's theory holds, is the origin of the concept of "guilt" (the German word for which is *Schuld*, closely related to *Schulden*, the word for 'debts'). We need only invent a creditor, or someone we have supposedly offended, and a crime (or unpaid debt) for which we are to be punished (or our creditor compensated). Gods or ancestors are naturally thought of as the creditor, and their imagined beneficence to us, or some imagined slights of ours toward them, are easily fabricated as the crime or debt for which they are to be compensated by our self-inflicted pain. If, as in the later Christian "purification" of moral standards, we come to regard as crimes not only harms to others (murder or adulterous union with another's spouse) but even the desire to do these forbidden things, then we may also come to regard our suppressed aggressive instincts themselves, even in their suppressed and frustrated form, as crimes deserving of punishment. There would then be a lovely psychic economy in the fact that we are first able to give expression to our aggressive desires when we inflict pain on ourselves as punishment just for having them.

Nietzsche's theory has the paradoxical consequence that, basically, people feel guilty not because they have done wrong, but because they have not. It therefore provides an elegant explanation of the easily observed fact that those who most precisely observe moral restrictions are also most sensitive to guilt feelings (St. Augustine still obsesses over the pears he stole as a child), while criminals and libertines, who licentiously violate the social mores, are seldom bothered by them. (At the same time, it provides an alternative deflationary interpretation of morality's categorization of the former type as "good" or "virtuous" and the latter as "evil" or "vicious.") The theory might also explain another less common but real phenomenon: why some people go out and commit crimes in order to relieve the psychic tension between their guilt feelings and the evident absence of any reason why they should feel guilty.<sup>81</sup>

The Third Essay of the *Genealogy* contains another fundamental and paradoxical Nietzschean idea, which might also be applied in various ways to derive

<sup>81</sup> Nietzsche poetically represents this phenomenon in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, First Part 6, "The Pale Criminal." Freud observed it in some of his patients: "Some Character Types Met With in Psychoanalytic Work," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (New York: Macmillan, 1964-), 19:53.

both content and structural critiques of morality. This is the idea that “the ascetic ideal” (negation of life, the will to suffering, ultimately the will to nothingness) is the only source of value that people have had so far. “Apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human animal, had no meaning so far.”<sup>82</sup> Nietzsche thinks the appeal of the ascetic ideal is manifold, and its manifestations extend, for instance, even to the modern scientific “will to truth” (which he interprets as a will to deprive people of the consolation of their religious illusions). These illusions are also expressions of the ascetic ideal, but depriving ourselves of them inflicts on us a more modern, refined, and exquisite kind of pain – an extra turn of the knife in our sensitive human flesh.

Nietzsche’s paradoxical idea that asceticism lies at the ground of all human wisdom should also be seen as a tribute to Schopenhauer, who was the first to suggest that asceticism, negation of the will to live, constitutes the ultimate truth lying at the core of all genuine philosophy and religion. Nietzsche, of course, thinks asceticism represents not a *truth* but a kind of sickness. But he agrees with Schopenhauer that it lies at the foundation of all human wisdom. It is just that wisdom itself, and even everything that is essential to humanity, must then be regarded, from a biological point of view, as a pervasive sickness. All the respects in which human beings regard themselves as superior to other animals and to the rest of nature consist, for Nietzsche, in expressions of an essentially diseased or dysfunctional phenomenon of life. The point of this, it would seem, is to cause us to reevaluate the entire idea of ‘wisdom’ as really a sickness, but also to reevaluate the whole idea of ‘sickness’, since it is seen to apply to everything we find most valuable about ourselves. The cumulative effect of Nietzsche’s antimoralism is thus to put in question every moralistic tendency to set up sharp divisions between “right and wrong” or “good and evil,” putting in their place a broad array of more complex and nuanced ways of interpreting every aspect of human life. In the end, Nietzsche’s only unambiguous enemy is probably what social conservatives nowadays like to call “moral clarity” (when they pride themselves on having it and castigate “liberals” and “relativists” for not having it). This may help to explain why, despite his grotesquely reactionary views on every possible political subject, ostentatiously expressed, Nietzsche’s primary appeal, at least in the past half-century or so, has always been to people toward the leftward end of the political spectrum.

At the end of the Second Essay, Nietzsche imagines an interlocutor asking him, “What are you really doing, erecting an ideal or knocking one down?”<sup>83</sup> He does not answer directly, and the question hangs over all three essays in the *Genealogy*, and over Nietzsche’s critiques of morality in general. It applies especially to his

<sup>82</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Third Essay, 28.

<sup>83</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Essay, 24.

handling of the ascetic ideal. Asceticism is so fundamental to Nietzsche's view of the world that the ultimate question about that view has to be "Is Nietzsche an opponent of asceticism or instead a proponent of it?" Nietzsche likes to raise questions without answering them, and his whole philosophy could be seen as having that, rather than propounding any set of doctrines, as its real aim. So without trying to resolve this question with any finality, let me suggest a provisional answer to it that will make him out to be both an opponent and a proponent of asceticism and that sheds some light on the conclusions Nietzsche might want us to draw from his various critiques of morality.

The suggestion is that, on the one hand, Nietzsche is looking for a way that human beings can at last achieve health by affirming life – and in that sense his position is directly opposed to asceticism. But Nietzsche is convinced that asceticism is so deeply woven into human nature, and especially into what makes human beings interesting, powerful, and great as phenomena of life, that he is not opposed at all to the *practice* of asceticism – to self-discipline, the infliction of suffering on oneself – when it serves the interests of increasing strength, creativity, and human greatness. This explains many of his *pro-moral* positions, such as that the name the sovereign individual – "autonomous and supramoral" (for "autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive) – will give to his dominant instinct is "his *conscience*."<sup>84</sup>

When most ordinary mortals are presented with antimoralist arguments or critiques of morality, our first reaction is to think: "Well, if this is right then there is no need for me to be constrained by morality when I can get away with it. If Nietzsche is right, then I am free to live for pleasure and concern myself with no one's self-interest but my own." And then we use philosophical antimoralism (as the pathologically spoiled child Sade evidently did) as an impudently sophistical rationalization for becoming moral degenerates. Or, after a little reflection on what this would mean, and after our moral conditioning and the craven cowardice at the bottom of our souls begin to take over, we reject Nietzsche's antimoralism wholesale precisely because we reject these unthinkable practical consequences. Or, after a little while longer, we start to combine the two reactions in a way that reinforces in us the familiar sordid and contemptible combination of self-inflated moral sentiment, hypocrisy, moral cowardice, and petty vices that constitutes most people's characters and conduct. One should imagine Nietzsche as being fully aware of this reaction to what he is saying and, in response, shaking his head and muttering under his breath: "Yes, that's just the conclusion a miserable specimen like *you* would draw from what I am saying! (That's exactly why the world would be better off without *you*.)"

<sup>84</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Essay, 2.

Nietzsche's endorsement of the practice of ascetical self-discipline, and even self-torture, is presented as clearly as anywhere in a passage with which I will conclude this survey. It involves some questionable presuppositions about both the tastes and the motivations of moralists of all stripes who see human happiness as a worthy cause, and it also offers us a picture of human creativity that may invite ridicule. But one point about which it leaves no room for doubt is Nietzsche's contemptuous attitude toward those who would interpret his antimoralism – or any antimoralism – as providing us with a pretext for leading a life of irresponsible self-indulgence:

Whether it is hedonism or pessimism, utilitarianism or eudaimonism – all those ways of thinking that measure the value of things in accordance with pleasure and pain, which are mere epiphenomena and wholly secondary, are ways of thinking that stay in the foreground and naïvetés on which everyone conscious of creative powers and an artistic conscience will look down not without derision, nor without compassion. Compassion with you – that of course is not compassion in your sense: it is not compassion with social “distress”, with “society” and its sick and unfortunate members. . . . Our compassion is a higher and more farsighted compassion: we see how *the human being* makes himself smaller, how *you* make him smaller. . . . You want, if possible – and there is no more insane “if possible” – to *abolish suffering*. And we? It really seems that we would rather have it higher and worse than ever. Well-being as you understand it – that is no goal, that seems to us an end, a state that soon makes the human being ridiculous and contemptible – that makes his destruction *desirable*.

The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering – do you not understand that only *this* discipline as created all enhancements of the human being so far? That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness – was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? In the human being *creature* and *creator* are united: in the human being there is material, fragment, excess, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in the human being there is also creator, form-giver, hammer hardness, spectator divinity and seventh day: do you understand this contrast? And that your compassion is for the “creature in the human being”, for what must be formed, broken, forged, torn burnt, made incandescent, and purified – that which *necessarily* must suffer and *should* suffer? And our compassion – do you not comprehend for whom our *converse* compassion is when it resists your compassion as the worst of all pamperings and weaknesses?<sup>85</sup>

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## **VI**

### **RELIGION**





## CHALLENGES TO RELIGION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

VAN A. HARVEY

### I

Although Europeans had been receiving reports about Buddhism since the thirteenth century – from Marco Polo, papal envoys, Jesuits, and Asian specialists – it was not until the midcentury that European intellectuals generally began to be aware that there was at least one major form of religion, Theravada Buddhism, which was atheistic. Nevertheless, the general tendency throughout the century was to conceive of the “essence of religion” as belief in supernatural deities and to regard monotheism as the most highly developed form of it. Consequently, most of the challenges to religion in the nineteenth century, like those in the seventeenth and eighteenth, tended to be challenges to theism generally and to the culturally predominant forms of it, Christianity and Judaism, particularly. And it will be these challenges with which we shall be primarily concerned.

What distinguishes the nineteenth from previous centuries is the extraordinary variety of these challenges. The attacks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were primarily philosophical and rationalistic, and the arguments swirled around such age-old issues as the cogency of the arguments for the existence of God, the possibility of miracles, and whether the existence of evil is compatible with the reality of an omnipotent and benevolent deity. But the challenges to religion in the nineteenth century were launched not only by philosophers but by political revolutionaries, liberal reformers, utilitarian moralists, positivistic social theorists, agnostics, and a variety of scholars working in the new specialized and increasingly professionalized forms of knowledge: anthropology, biology, geology, history, psychology, and sociology.

To anticipate what follows, we may say in general that between 1815 and 1848 most of the important and explicit attacks on religion in Europe arose when a hierarchical and authoritarian political order appealed to Christianity, the established religion, as a justification for the repression of criticism of that political order so that political reformers, who found themselves harassed by censors and the secret police, were driven to the conclusion that a criticism of society must begin with

a critique of the established religion. In the last two thirds of the century, however, the criticisms of religion were not politically motivated but arose from the habits of mind associated with the new forms of knowledge that emerged with the Industrial Revolution and that were systematized and professionalized as academic disciplines in the new schools and universities. The conclusions of the new geology, biology, history, sociology, and anthropology not only raised questions about specific Christian and Jewish beliefs – Is the world older than the Bible claims? Can one believe the Christian account of creation? Did human beings evolve from less complex forms of life? Is the Bible a trustworthy historical document at all? – but the ethos of these disciplines was to distrust all appeals to faith and to consider seriously only those claims that could be supported empirically. When this ethos was extended to larger religious and metaphysical claims about the Divine the results were agnosticism and skepticism.

## II

Despite the sometimes savage rationalistic attacks on religion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there actually was a renaissance of religion among intellectuals in the first third of the nineteenth. In England, Paley's *Natural Religion* (1802) had virtually eclipsed David Hume's attack on the teleological arguments in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779); in Europe, romanticism, pietism, and even Catholic traditionalism were flourishing; and in America, transcendentalism was in vogue. As late as the thirties, Germany's most influential philosopher, Hegel, had argued not only that Christianity was the symbolic expression of Absolute Truth but also that the state should require that citizens belong to some religious community, although it need not necessarily be the Christian.<sup>1</sup>

Some might argue that Immanuel Kant had made this renaissance of religion possible. Had he not himself claimed to have limited reason in order to make room for faith? And had he not also argued that the idea of God was a necessary postulate of the moral reason? But Kant's limitations on reason only made room for a "religion within the limits of reason alone," a religion that necessarily excluded appeals to revelation and supernaturalism. He argued that a person does have a right to orient oneself in thinking by means of the idea of a deity that is the basis of natural order and the moral law, but this orientation excludes appeals to "any alleged sense of truth ... [or] ... any transcendent intuition under

<sup>1</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 295. G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke: Theorieerkaufgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970) [hereafter Hegel, *Werke*], sec. 270, *Anmerkung*.

the name of faith, on which tradition or revelation can be grafted without reason's consent."<sup>2</sup>

If, then, romantics, pietists, and Hegelians celebrated "positive religion," in contrast to religion within the limits of reason alone, this was only possible because they rejected Kant's philosophy in distinctive ways. For example, in the most famous expression of religious romanticism, *Speeches on Religion to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799), F. D. E. Schleiermacher argued that religion was not based on either reason or morality. Rather, religion has to do with a special type of intuition and its concomitant feeling: an intuition of the universe as a whole and a feeling of being at one with it. Ideas and dogmas were expressions of these feelings, varying from religion to religion depending upon the religious experience of the founder of that religion.<sup>3</sup> Although S. T. Coleridge, the English romantic, did not agree with Schleiermacher's rejection of the cognitive element in religion, he nevertheless also interpreted Kant's distinction between reason and understanding in such a way that reason was taken to deal with spiritual realities, at the heart of which is our intuition of being related to a "living whole." But it was Hegel's critique of Kant and his construction of a new speculative system of which Christianity was the true symbolic expression that secured the prestige of Christianity in the heartland of Europe.

Despite this flourishing of Christianity in the first third of the century, there were powerful institutional, social, and ideological forces at work that inevitably collided with the old authoritarian political order and its identification with Christianity. The French Revolution and the invasion of Europe by Napoleon had already helped to weaken the old certainties, but with the subsequent growth of population, urbanization, and an increasing industrialization that required commercial laws based on contracts, there emerged in Europe a powerful demand among the new middle classes for participation in the political process. And there were even more radical calls for reform and revolution by socialists and communists who championed the rights of the impoverished working class.

The tensions between the old and the new orders were exacerbated when after the defeat of Napoleon the Congress of Vienna (1815) under the leadership of Metternich was able to reestablish an oppressive, authoritarian order over most of central Europe. Most offensive to the reformers were the Carlsbad decrees

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8. *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [hereafter Kant, Ak], 8:134.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), Speeches 2 and 5. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Hans-Joachim Birkner et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 1:2.

(1819), which not only established censorship of the press and universities' faculties, but aimed at the repression of nationalistic, liberal, and reform movements of all sorts, a repression that involved the widespread use of secret police. Out of this collision of state and movements of reform in Prussia there emerged three of the most important critics of religion: David Friedrich Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Karl Marx. Paradoxically, all three of these critics thought of themselves as indebted to Hegel, the philosopher to whom supporters of the church-state establishment in the German states appealed. It was Hegel, these young radicals believed, who had liberated them from all provincial political and religious beliefs and who had taught them that the march of the World Spirit was the march of critical reason. But when his young followers had used critical reason to criticize what they thought to be irrational aspects of their own society and religion, they were censored by the authorities and, in the case of those who were academics, dismissed from their positions in the universities. When David Friedrich Strauss, for example, argued in his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835) that critical historical inquiry not only failed to support orthodox Christian belief but also yielded results incompatible with Hegel's philosophy of religion, he was dismissed from his position as a tutor and banned by the university establishment. And when Ludwig Feuerbach ventured to suggest that the Christian doctrine of immortality was incompatible with idealism, he, too, was fired from the faculty of Erlangen and unable to find a new position. Indeed, as Karl Löwith has pointed out, an entire generation that was nurtured for the university found itself alienated and forced to create a new intellectual vocation of pamphleteer and journalist.<sup>4</sup> But even when these young rebels founded private journals in which to express their criticisms, as in the case of Karl Marx's liberal *Rheinische Zeitung* or Arnold Ruge's *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, these journals were shut down by the censors or forced to leave the country. Indeed, the long arm of censorship even reached Marx and Ruge in Paris, where they had transplanted their *Jahrbücher*. It is no wonder that this generation concluded that a criticism of religion was a necessary condition for the reformation of society.

Strauss's attack, to which we will return later, was directed primarily against Hegel's attempt to show that his idealism was compatible with Christianity, but Feuerbach's and Marx's criticisms involved a full-scale assault on theism itself in all of its forms. Feuerbach argued in his famous early work *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) that the idea of God arises involuntarily in the act by which the self differentiates itself from other selves, a differentiation that Hegel had described so profoundly in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the necessary condition

<sup>4</sup> Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, trans. David E. Green (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1967), 65.

of self-consciousness. In this act of self-differentiation, the self unconsciously realizes that it is a member of a species. It then projects or objectifies this idea of the species and transforms it into a heavenly Subject (a Thou), for whom human life then becomes an object. God, in other words, is the notion of the species transformed into a divine subject with perfect knowledge, will, and, above all, feeling. The imagination under the pressure of desire then seizes on this involuntary and unconscious projection of human attributes and makes it an object of reflection and worship.

The idea of God, Feuerbach claimed, is relatively harmless as an involuntary projection, but when it becomes an object of conscious theological reflection, it is the source of contradictions, moral mischief, and human alienation. The alienation occurs because all of the intrinsic human perfections are ascribed to some "divine other." He believed that the act of attributing these predicates to an external object necessarily deprives the human species of those potentialities that it should claim as its own. The human being contemplates its own nature as something foreign or alien. "Man denies as to himself only what he attributes to God."<sup>5</sup>

Among the many objections Feuerbach makes to both Judaism and Christianity is that they are basically an expression of human egoism. In Judaism, this can be seen in what he calls its "utilism," where nature is regarded as a mere means toward achieving the well-being of the community, a mere object of human will. Unlike Greek religion, in which nature may be regarded as an object of theoretical reflection, Judaism views the world as the vassal of its own self-interest. Although Marx Wartofsky criticized this view as anti-Semitic,<sup>6</sup> it should be noted that Feuerbach was even more critical of Christianity because he regarded it simply as an individualized form of the egoism already present in Judaism, both egoisms arising out of the idea of creation *ex nihilo*. In Judaism, the religious consciousness is circumscribed by a national interest, but we need only let these limits fall to have the Christian religion. "The Christian religion is the Jewish religion purified from national egoism."<sup>7</sup>

This radicalized egoism can be seen in Christianity in the extremes to which it goes to exempt the individual self from all natural and objective limitations, especially the limitation of death. It can be seen in the practice of intercessory prayer, in the belief in miracles, and, above all, in the doctrine of resurrection. All these practices and beliefs express the faith that there is a supernatural being that can

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1989), 27. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Werner Schuffenhauer (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1967) [hereafter Feuerbach, GW], 5:66.

<sup>6</sup> Marx Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 319.

<sup>7</sup> Feuerbach, *Essence*, 120; Feuerbach, GW 5:217–18.

set aside the restrictions and necessities of nature. Feuerbach even argued that it is this egoism that generates the belief in an omnipotent creator because only such a being could set aside the necessities of nature. Moreover, when Christianity links the doctrine of immortality to proper belief, it commits itself to the notion that nonbelievers are eternally condemned, with the result that the doctrine of faith is at odds with the doctrine of universal love.<sup>8</sup> In short, the Christian considers the world entirely from the standpoint of the narrow aims of the self, and this manifests itself both in the inner life of believers and in their approach to physical nature. Faith is basically narcissism.

Although it could not be made explicit in *The Essence of Christianity* because of the threat of the censors, we know that Feuerbach's criticisms were politically as well as philosophically motivated. The precondition for taking control of one's own political destiny, he believed, was to abandon the illusion of a supernatural destiny. "The purpose of my ... books," he wrote in 1848,

is to transform theologians into anthropologists, lovers of God into lovers of man, candidates for the next world into students of this world, religious and political flunkies of heavenly and earthly monarchs and lords into free, self-reliant citizens of the earth.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, Feuerbach believed that he was living at the end of an era that represented both the practical and the theoretical dissolution of Christianity (the former by Luther, the latter by Hegel) and that the newly emerging cultural era would be characterized by the birth of freedom and the full participation of the citizenry in politics.<sup>10</sup>

Although Feuerbach's book created a sensation in Europe, he was not satisfied with it and continued to revise his views on religion. In *Das Wesen der Religion* (1846) and then again in the lectures based on them (1848) he minimized the self-differentiation argument of *The Essence of Christianity* in favor of the view that religions arise when the conscious self (the I), driven by the desire for happiness (*Glückseligkeitstrieb*), is confronted by everything external to itself that limits it (nature, the "not-I") but upon which it is absolutely dependent. The conscious self, the I, becomes aware of this dependence and limitedness, and out of its anxiety and fear of death it reifies and personalizes these forces. In the case of more advanced cultures that can view the world as an ordered whole, the self unifies these forces and transforms them into a cosmic subject that recognizes and cares for the self. Oversimplified, it is this basic human desire for recognition and

<sup>8</sup> Feuerbach, *Essence*, chap. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 23. Feuerbach, GW 6:66.

<sup>10</sup> See Feuerbach's *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred H. Vogel (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966). Feuerbach, GW 9.

preservation confronted by an indifferent nature that accounts for the persistence of religion in general but especially for the psychological hold of monotheism.

Feuerbach was especially concerned to show that this view best explains why the ordinary Christian clings to the doctrines of providence, miracle, prayer, and, above all, resurrection or immortality. All of these doctrines represent the Promethean desire to be a free lord of nature; that is, a self not bound by the causal nexus of which death is a part. Miracles are important to the ordinary believer despite the embarrassment they cause to rationalist theologians because they are the proofs to faith that "nature itself is dependent on a supernatural being and owes its existence solely to the arbitrary exercise of this being's will."<sup>11</sup> It is this same belief that fulfills the wish for immortality. But such a wish, Feuerbach argued, is an "absurd, extravagant desire." Proper desires are those rooted in one's social location, family, city, and country and that constitute the horizon of one's responsibilities. "We must therefore modify our goals and exchange divinity ... for human nature, religion for education, the hereafter in heaven for the hereafter on earth, that is, the *historical future*, the future of mankind."<sup>12</sup>

Karl Marx had been impressed by the way in which Feuerbach had extracted what was of value in Hegel's philosophy of spirit without becoming entangled in Hegel's mystifications. For Marx, "Feuerbach is the only person who has a serious and a critical attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made real discoveries in this field. He is the true conqueror of the old philosophy."<sup>13</sup> Marx was also impressed by Feuerbach's criticism of religion because "the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism."<sup>14</sup> But in his "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845) he also argued that Feuerbach had failed to see that the individual is not an abstract being "squatting outside the world" but a being living in and influenced by social and political structures. If the state and society produce religion, and if religion is the expression of an alienated existence, then the struggle against religion should be a struggle against that world of which religion is simply the "inverted consciousness." For this reason, Marx argued, we do not need a theoretical critique of religion so much as a praxis that changes the social conditions that produced and sustain religion.

The criticisms of Feuerbach and Marx are important for two reasons. First of all, they articulated what were to become two of the most enduring criticisms

<sup>11</sup> Feuerbach, *Lectures*, 234. Feuerbach, GW 6:262.

<sup>12</sup> Feuerbach, *Lectures*, 281. Feuerbach, GW 6:315.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975-) [hereafter Marx, CW], 3:328; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx Engels Werke*, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (Berlin: Dietz, 1956-90) [hereafter Marx, MEW], *Ergänzungsheft*, 1. Teil, 569.

<sup>14</sup> Marx, CW 3:175; Marx, MEW 1:378.



of religion in the twentieth century: (a) that the idea of God is a psychological projection, a criticism restated in Freud as well as in the writings of many sociologists and anthropologists; and (b) that religion is an epiphenomenon of social structures. Second, they were important because they did not just dismiss religion as superstition but argued that it was a natural, perhaps inevitable, illusion of consciousness. In Feuerbach's case, religion is an expression of the deepest yearnings of the human subject: to be recognized and affirmed by "an other" who can providentially set aside the necessities of nature.

### III

The industrialization of Continental Europe lagged behind that of England, but by the middle of the century it, too, had spawned a large middle class, a host of professions associated with industrialization, and an impoverished working class, all of which were at odds with the old authoritarian order. The reformers who regarded themselves as spokesmen for the impoverished working classes were, like Marx and the socialists, more radical than those who represented the middle classes, whom we may characterize somewhat loosely as "liberal" rather than radical. The characterization is loose because although most liberals were in agreement on such ideas as the freedom to own and dispose of property, to have access to a free press and to schools and universities, and to practice religion apart from state interference, they differed among themselves and from the radicals regarding the political implementation of these ideas.<sup>15</sup> Not all of these liberals, for example, were democrats.

The liberal middle classes generally were not hostile to religion; they only wanted constitutional guarantees that protected their practice of religion from interference by the state. Those liberal intellectuals who were hostile, like Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, were so because they believed that religion failed the test of "utility" with respect to both society and the individual. Bentham, for example, argued in his *Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind* (1822), a title that conceals its polemic against organized religion, that religion is both a social and an individual evil: social, because it creates intolerance of unbelievers and heretics and gives power to priests who conspire with rulers to maintain the status quo; individual, because it prohibits innocent pleasures and instills fear of eternal torments. "Our duty to God," he concludes, "is a deduction from the pleasures of the individual without at all benefiting the species."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), chaps. 1–2.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted by Franklin L. Baumer, *Religion and the Rise of Scepticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960), 142.

It is ironical that it took a religious defender of the old order, John Henry Newman, to clarify for an otherwise naive liberal consciousness just how and why he believed that liberalism itself was incompatible with classical Christianity and perhaps theism itself.<sup>17</sup> This clarification occurs in a note entitled "Liberalism" that he later added to his *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1865). There he defined liberalism as that "false liberty of thought upon matters, in which, from the constitution of the human mind, thought cannot be brought to any successful issue and, therefore, is out of place," and he then included among such matters the "truths of revelation" contained in the Bible.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, he argued that liberalism was not only committed to liberty of thought but to the view that there is "no existing authority on earth competent to interfere with the liberty of individuals in reasoning and judging for themselves about the Bible and its contents, as they severally please." Indeed, the liberal is even committed to the thesis that "no revealed doctrines or precepts may reasonably stand in the way of scientific conclusions."<sup>19</sup>

Newman's importance is that he saw that this incompatibility between liberalism and Christian faith was much more than a disagreement regarding the legitimate scope of reason. It was also a conflict of moral principles because the liberal believed that "there are rights of conscience such that everyone may lawfully advance a claim to profess and teach what is false and wrong ... provided that to his private conscience it seems absolutely true and right."<sup>20</sup> It is because liberalism stood on the principle of "rights of conscience" that Newman saw that it was useless to quarrel with it. Consequently, "together with the High Church, I earnestly denounced and abjured it."<sup>21</sup>

It is important to pause and reflect on Newman's delineation of the incompatibility of liberalism with Christian belief because it sheds a great deal of light not only on the structure and dynamics of the challenges to religious belief in the last part of the nineteenth century but also on that interesting phenomenon of Victorian intellectuals who regarded skepticism regarding religious belief as a moral obligation. First of all, one must understand that Newman as a Christian embraced a religion that taken as a whole is a web of different logical types of belief: cosmological, anthropological, biological, historical, and moral. These various beliefs are related in complex and subtle ways. Sometimes one or two of them are so interwoven that to alter or to change one of them puts an intolerable

<sup>17</sup> He abhorred the French flag and liberalism and kept a copy of Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* locked in a safe lest it stain the imagination of his students. See Geoffrey Faber, *Oxford Apostles* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1954), 18.

<sup>18</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, ed. David J. DeLaura (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 218.

<sup>19</sup> Newman, *Apologia*, 223.

<sup>20</sup> Newman, *Apologia*, 223.

<sup>21</sup> Newman, *Apologia*, 222.

strain on a quite different strand. For example, what appears to be a historical claim – say, about Adam and Eve – was closely associated in Christian doctrine with an anthropological claim of a certain sort: the doctrine of Original Sin. Consequently, to cast doubts about the historicity of the former naturally raises problems concerning the latter, which, in turn, require reconsideration of the Christian doctrine of salvation.

Sometimes, however, the logical connections between various Christian beliefs are much looser than those who appeal to a monolithic “Christian faith” acknowledge. Liberals saw that it is possible to jettison one logical type of traditional belief without importantly altering some more fundamental theological belief. One could question, for example, the literalness of the stories of Jesus’s birth without denying the truth of the doctrine of the Incarnation. In fact, the history of liberal Christianity might be seen as the history of picking apart certain strands of the garment of Christian orthodoxy without unraveling it entirely.

Given this complex web of Christian belief, it was inevitable that the new scholarly professions that were emerging with the Industrial Revolution and in which so many intellectuals labored would cast up theories and conclusions that seemed inconsistent with many Christian beliefs. The new geology, for example, raised questions about the age of the Earth that many theologians claimed to derive from the genealogies in the Bible, just as the new biology could not accept the biblical account of creation. Moreover, by the mid-nineteenth century the sciences were becoming increasingly specialized and professionalized. Intellectuals were not scientists in general but biologists, botanists, chemists, geologists, physicists, and historians. They did not pursue knowledge in general but specialized forms of knowledge, each with its own subject-matter, methods of procedures, types and rules of evidence, conceptualities, and modes of argumentation. As specialists in a discipline they were also members of intellectual professions with their own journals, conferences, organizations, award-granting agencies, and hierarchies of prestige.<sup>22</sup>

Newman’s attempt to claim the entire range of differing logical types of Christian beliefs to be beyond the competence of any of these intellectual disciplines was simply unacceptable to the liberal intellectual, whose successful participation in any one of these knowledge professions required certain habits of inquiry and judgment. The biologist, for example, was trained to isolate, consider, and judge those arguments and procedures accepted by the community of biologists, just as the historian was trained to adhere to the methods and standards of the community of historians. To ask these professionals to surrender a conclusion that

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between academic disciplines and the growth of professions see Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

had emerged as a consensus of the intellectual discipline to which they belonged just because that conclusion conflicted with some specific religious belief was to ask them not only to abandon their discipline but to relinquish whatever prestige they had acquired by exhibiting the highest standards of their profession.

A second, less noticed but more important facet of Newman's discussion of liberalism is his insight that the liberal intellectual regarded the exercise of his rational autonomy to be a matter of conscience. But what Newman did not seem sufficiently to reflect on is that the conscience of the professional was attached not to some abstract liberty of thought but, as I have noted, to the procedures, rules of evidence, and norms of argumentation of the intellectual profession to which the scholar belonged. Consequently, when faced with a conflict between those conclusions that the discipline yielded and those that religious authorities claimed should be held "on faith," the Victorian intellectual felt morally obligated to the profession. The vocation of scholarship, one might say, entailed a role-specific "ethics of belief."<sup>23</sup>

We may illustrate these very issues by considering two of the most important problems that the knowledge professions posed for Christianity in the nineteenth century: the first was posed by the intellectual discipline of history; the second, by Darwin's theory of evolution.

### *History*

The emergence of critical history in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has sometimes been said to have been the result of a revolution in consciousness: the recognition of the discrepancy between ancient and contemporary modes of thought, the growth of language and the development of states, the tendency to evaluate events in terms of their origins, and the awareness of the relativity of one's own norms of thought and evaluation.<sup>24</sup>

This revolution found its institutional expression in the creation of a "new science," history, that was grounded in an almost Faustian will-to-know the past "as it really was." Although this attempt to recover the past "as it really was" now sounds naive to us, we should not minimize how revolutionary the effort was or how reactionary its opponents were. This attempt to recover the past gradually required the development of procedures of inquiry that we may loosely call a method. This method, first of all, put a premium on the autonomy of the

<sup>23</sup> See James C. Livingston, *The Ethics of Belief: An Essay on the Victorian Religious Conscience* (Tallahassee, Fla.: American Academy of Religion, 1974).

<sup>24</sup> Ernst Troeltsch thought this change in thought so profound that it deserved to be put along previous cultural epochs as a unique type. See *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1902), 1.

historian, which is to say, the refusal to accept uncritically the testimonies of so-called witnesses. Nor could the critical historian accept the authority of other historians without justifying this acceptance. This critical spirit was not arbitrary but grew out of the gradual recognition of how so much previous written history had been based on credulous spinners of tales and legends.

This new autonomy of the historian was balanced by the acknowledged responsibility for justifying his/her conclusions in such a way that they could be assessed by other historians competent to do so. This responsibility put the highest priority on evidence, logical candor, and the giving of reasons for one's claims. These reasons and justifications were quite naturally grounded in what might be called a "methodological naturalism," which is to say, the historian's arguments and rules of evidence naturally ruled out appeals to faith, intuition, or some alleged truth sense. Moreover, historians made their judgments about the past against the background of what they took to be publicly accessible present knowledge, a knowledge that naturally reflected the worldview of the new natural sciences. The result was a professional skepticism about alleged supernatural and miraculous events.

As early as the seventeenth century, biblical historians had begun to apply the same historical methods to the text of the Bible that secular historians had found so successful when applied to the ancient literature of Greece and Rome. And by the early nineteenth century, the application of these critical methods to the New Testament had yielded a number of problems: the relationships among the four Gospels; the problem of their authorship, since the names of the authors were discovered to have been attached to the texts much later; and, above all, their validity as sources for a life of Jesus.

In 1835, David Friedrich Strauss, one of the Young Hegelians' theologians, produced a massive 1,500-page book, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, in which he showed the untenability of the two prevailing modes of New Testament interpretation: the supernaturalistic, on the one hand, and the rationalistic, on the other. The supernaturalists interpreted the miracle stories as instances of divine intervention while the rationalists interpreted the stories as mistaken interpretations by witnesses or as events that could be explained naturalistically. Neither of them, however, questioned the historical authenticity of the stories. In a devastating fashion, Strauss used the two views to refute each other and argued that the discrepancies and contradictions in the gospel histories could only be reconciled by regarding them as myth.

By "myth" Strauss did not mean the stories were fictional or untrue. Following Hegel, he took myth to mean the poetic or imaginative imagery (*Vorstellung*) in which the religious soul naturally expresses its ideas (*Begriffe*). Religion, for the Hegelians, was by definition an imaginative mode of perception, in contrast to

the conceptual mode of philosophy. There may be “pure myths” in which there is no historical core at all, but there can also be historical myths that have been attached to historical events or influenced by them. The New Testament tradition about Jesus, Strauss argued, may best be seen as an “evangelical myth,” the attachment to Jesus of the religious imagery of a particular people, the Hebrews. And the predominant religious idea of this community was the expectation of a Messiah, who was to be descended from David, a prophet of righteousness, a healer of the sick, a miracle worker, and who would be taken up into heaven. The logic of the New Testament was, Strauss argued, “Such and such things must have happened to the Messiah; Jesus was the Messiah; therefore such and such things happened to him.”<sup>25</sup>

Since the greater part of Strauss’s book was dedicated to examining every New Testament narrative in order to sort out the mythical and the legendary from the historical, the cumulative effect of this minute analysis was to undermine the historical underpinnings of the Christian faith. The picture of Jesus that emerged simply did not support either orthodox, Hegelian, or liberal Protestant conceptions of Jesus. The book created a sensation. As Albert Schweitzer noted in his classic work on the nineteenth-century search for the historical Jesus, “Scarcely ever has a book let loose such a storm of controversy,”<sup>26</sup> a controversy that has preoccupied New Testament scholars up to our own time.

Before 1848, the church could and did appeal to the state to censor New Testament historians like Strauss whose work challenged traditional Christian historical beliefs. But as the principle of academic freedom became solidified in liberal university culture, this form of censorship became less and less acceptable. Moreover, one could not convincingly argue, as Newman’s criticism of liberalism seemed to suggest, that New Testament scholarship was the result of a “false liberty of thought” upon matters about which it was incompetent to judge. Rather, it was the ecclesiastical authority without historical training who came to be regarded as the incompetent one in such matters.

Increasingly, the only convincing way to meet the intellectual challenges to religious faith was for the religious apologists to use the same modes of scholarship their critics employed. Historical claims could only be challenged on historical grounds. But to do this required that the apologists not only become acquainted with the literature, rules, and procedures of the discipline, but, more importantly, that they abandon any appeal to revelation or faith in order to protect some events from the historians’ scrutiny. This, in turn, changed the dynamics of the

<sup>25</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 84.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 97.

debate between belief and scholarship. It transformed what had been a religious debate into a professional historical one. And to the degree to which Newman had claimed that religious belief should trump all evidence and disciplinary procedures, he assaulted the intellectual integrity both of the historian and of those readers who put their confidence in the methods of historical reasoning.

It is difficult to underestimate the degree to which this ascendancy of historical reasoning undermined confidence in the truth of Christianity for many nineteenth-century intellectuals, as has recently been shown in the case of Jacob Burckhardt, whose career illustrates how biblical criticism and the historization of belief not only undermined Christian belief but led to its outright rejection.<sup>27</sup>

### *Evolution*

A second and better-known example of the way in which results produced by a specific mode of inquiry challenged traditional religious views is, of course, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Unfortunately, our understanding of the history of this challenge has been obscured until recently by the popular acceptance of the Wilberforce-Huxley debate and the Scopes trial as representative of the real issues at stake. Actually, the controversy was much more complex and diverse. There were a variety of responses to Darwin among scientists, both negative and positive, just as there also was among theologians. Although there were Protestant theologians who, like Charles Hodge, believed in "plenary inspiration" of the whole Bible and vigorously rejected the theory, most liberal Protestant theologians as well as Roman Catholics had by 1860 already given up biblical literalism and could consider more or less dispassionately whether the theory was intrinsically opposed to Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

Two of the most fiercely debated issues among scientists were the fixity of species and Darwin's postulated explanation for the process of evolution itself, namely, natural selection, the idea that in the struggle for existence "small differences distinguishing varieties of the same species, steadily tend to increase, till they equal the greater differences between species of the same genus, or even of distinct genera."<sup>29</sup> It was this latter idea, it could be argued, that raised the

<sup>27</sup> See Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129ff.

<sup>28</sup> Claude Welch has an excellent discussion of the various stages of the controversy in his *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2, 1870–1914 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), chap. 6.

<sup>29</sup> From *The Origin of Species*, in *Darwin, A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 86.

most profound issue for theism, and theologians were, in fact, divided over the matter. James McCosh, a good Calvinist, argued, as did others such as Archibald Alexander Hodge, Joseph S. Van Dyke, and Baden-Powell in his contribution to the important *Essays and Reviews* of 1860, that natural selection and variation could be understood as the deity's mode of supernatural guidance. But there were others, like Charles Hodge, who argued that natural selection necessarily excluded design. According to Darwin, he observed, everything including plants and the varieties of human beings with their moral and religious nature were evolved from blind, unconscious laws of nature. Hence the only conclusion to be drawn is atheism.

It can be argued that this is still the point at issue between theism and evolutionary theory, as can be seen in the contemporary arguments between those who insist on "intelligent design" and those who argue that natural selection itself is sufficient to explain the origins of species. But however philosophical this issue may be claimed to be, it cannot now be intelligently discussed, not to speak of being settled, without a detailed knowledge of the extremely diverse and detailed scientific literature relevant to evolutionary theory, for example, whether there are intermediate stages to be found in the formation of the eye and whether these stages were advantageously functional or not. The relevant debates over these matters are not armchair but scientific debates because the only criticisms that biologists, anthropologists, and paleontologists will even consider are those that are based on the archaeological record or that yield hypotheses capable of being tested by procedures relevant to their disciplines, which is to say, that do not interject faith or appeals to mystery into the argument.

The explosion of technology and the success of the various specialized forms of knowledge naturally led many intellectuals in Victorian England to the broader conviction that the key to human progress lay in embracing empirical modes of inquiry in every sphere of life and, therefore, that one ought to be skeptical regarding both philosophical speculation and religious belief. Civilization, they argued, is bound together by the formation of modes of thought and belief that have been established over long stretches of time and only after having survived fearless questioning. No one's beliefs, argued William Kingdon Clifford, are private matters because

our lives are guided by that general conception of things which has been created for social purposes. Our words, our phrases . . . our modes of thought, are common property, fashioned and perfected from age to age; an heirloom which every succeeding generation inherits as a precious deposit and a sacred trust to be handed on to the next one.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> William Kingdon Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1999), 73–4.



Intellectuals, therefore, have a special responsibility for society and, hence, for guarding themselves against unjustified beliefs “as from a pestilence” because carelessly formed beliefs prepare the mind to receive more like them. Moreover, the “literate classes” should also take a leading role in guiding educational policy, a policy that should have as its aim the creation of a citizenry with certain virtues of mind and character, the chief of which is the habit of forming only justified beliefs. They should teach that it is the duty of every person in society, no matter how humble the station, to guard the purity of his/her beliefs, that it is “wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything on insufficient evidence.”<sup>31</sup> Or, as G. M. Young was later to describe this imperative: the schools should teach that “a man has no more right to an opinion for which he cannot account than to a pint of beer for which he cannot pay.”<sup>32</sup>

The most famous spokesman for skepticism of all unjustified beliefs was T. H. Huxley, and he coined the term “agnosticism” to characterize this skepticism. Huxley’s “agnosticism” had two prongs: skepticism regarding the claims of metaphysicians or theologians to have produced knowledge and skepticism regarding the historical tradition about Jesus in the New Testament. As regards the former, Huxley was by his own admission indebted to Hume, Kant, and William Hamilton; as regards the latter, to Strauss, Baur, Reuss, Volkmar, and Renan.<sup>33</sup>

To use the term “agnosticism” to cover both of these forms of skepticism, however, can lead to confusion in one’s interpretation of this period because some religious apologists also regarded metaphysical agnosticism as consistent with Christian faith, as can be seen in Bishop Mansel’s famous Bampton Lectures *The Limits of Religious Thought* (1858). Following Kant, Mansel had argued that the human mind is unable to know the Divine but that God, nevertheless, had provided “regulative truths” for human conduct in Scripture. James Livingston, therefore, distinguishes between a “right-wing” agnosticism such as Mansel’s and a “left-wing” agnosticism characteristic of Huxley, Leslie Stephen, Clifford, and others, who were hostile to all unjustified beliefs, especially religious beliefs.<sup>34</sup>

The relevance of biblical criticism for Huxley’s skepticism regarding Christian belief is often overlooked by historians of the period. Huxley thought not only that the divergence of opinion among metaphysicians and philosophers canceled out their claims to possess knowledge of the transcendent but that biblical

<sup>31</sup> Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief*, 77.

<sup>32</sup> George Malcolm Young, *Victorian Essays*, ed. W. D. Handcock (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 7.

<sup>33</sup> See “Agnosticism,” in *Selections from the Essays of T. H. Huxley*, ed. Alburey Castell (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), 72n2.

<sup>34</sup> James C. Livingston, “British Agnosticism,” in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, eds. Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Patrick Sherry, and Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 2:231–70.

criticism had shown that the four Gospels were unreliable documents so far as reconstructing the life of Jesus is concerned. He thought that stories like the healing of the Gadarene demoniac reveal how deeply the authors of the New Testament shared the superstitious views of their time.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, he felt that they could not be trusted on any matter concerning the unseen world.

By embracing this historical skepticism regarding the New Testament, Huxley in effect attacked Mansel's religious apology at its most vulnerable point, for if there is no justification for the historical claims that constitute the regulative truths human beings can have about the Unknowable, then suspension of judgment regarding the New Testament and metaphysics is a matter of duty for those who hold a rigorous ethics of belief.

#### IV

Any consideration of the more strictly philosophical challenges to religion in the nineteenth century can hardly fail to consider Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Although Nietzsche hyperbolically claimed that Schopenhauer was "the first admitted and inexorable atheist among us Germans,"<sup>36</sup> this claim obscures the fact that Schopenhauer had a very complex, one might even say dialectical, attitude toward religion generally and Christianity particularly. It also ignores Feuerbach, who surely deserves that honor, if it be such. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Schopenhauer was the first philosopher to provide a metaphysical surrogate for the prevailing Christian *Weltanschauung*. For him, the phenomenal world was but the manifestation of an underlying, impersonal, and irrational life force (Will) of which human creatures were but one form of individuation. This individuation takes the form of an insatiable desire to live, a desire that overrides the desires of others. The results are universal conflict and its accompanying suffering. The only emancipation from this raging desire consists in the acceptance of the ephemerality and the vanity of existence and, above all, requires the negation of the will and desire.

Schopenhauer judged the worth of any given religion to the degree that it approximated this pessimistic philosophy, and he believed that what he called Brahmanism and Buddhism were the best exemplars of this. Like Nietzsche, he believed that the various religions arose out of the metaphysical needs of the masses, but unlike Nietzsche, he believed that religions were often the vehicles

<sup>35</sup> Huxley, "Agnosticism," 76.

<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1974), bk. V, 307. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, Kritische Studienausgabe, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967–77) [hereafter Nietzsche, SW], 3:599.

for profound philosophical truths, albeit these truths were expressed in the only form that the unphilosophical masses could appropriate, namely, allegory and myth.<sup>37</sup> Schopenhauer also differed from Nietzsche in that he was not an unqualified enemy of Christianity, although, paradoxically, he was an enemy of personal theism. Indeed, he regarded it to be “idolatry the moment we have before us a personal being to whom we make sacrifice.”<sup>38</sup>

The doctrines of Christianity that he appreciated were those that emphasized the depravity of human nature, predestination, grace, and damnation. Indeed, he wrote that “only the Augustinian doctrine confirmed by Luther” is “perfect Christianity.”<sup>39</sup> These stark doctrines are precisely those, he believed, that make Christianity superior to Judaism, Greek religion, and Islam, all of which he believed to be optimistic religions. Accordingly, he was also contemptuous of all Pelagian and liberal (optimistic) interpretations of Christianity.

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer believed that whatever was true in Christianity was better expressed in Brahmanism and Buddhism, and at one point he offered the hypothesis that the religious and moral elements of Christianity were put together by Alexandrian Jews acquainted with Indian and Buddhist ideas.<sup>40</sup> These Asian religions also affirm that most human beings are depraved and that only a very few will achieve emancipation, but these ideas are less offensive in Buddhism than Christianity because of the former’s doctrine of metempsychosis, or reincarnation. Moreover, Buddhism recognizes the kinship of human beings with the animal world, whereas Christianity, following the book of Genesis, is defective because it makes “man the first professor of zoology by commissioning him to give animals their names in the future” and hands them over so that humans might rule and do with them as they please.<sup>41</sup> But most importantly, Buddhism was not flawed by the notion of a creator who creates from nothing, a notion taken over from Judaism. Moreover, Christianity is especially hampered because it is bound up with a historical narrative that is itself a part of the dogma, because “a religion which has as its foundation a single event, and [which] tries to make the turning-point of the world and of all existence out of that event ... has so feeble a foundation that it cannot possibly survive, the moment men come to reflect on the matter.”<sup>42</sup> As knowledge steadily increases, he concluded, it must gradually be pushed aside and “reach a size at which the myths that constitute

<sup>37</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), II. 389.

<sup>38</sup> Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, II. 378.

<sup>39</sup> Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, II. 364.

<sup>40</sup> Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, II. 385.

<sup>41</sup> Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, II. 370.

<sup>42</sup> Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, II. 393.

the skeleton of Christianity shrink so that faith can no longer cling to them. Mankind outgrows religion just as it does the clothes of childhood.”<sup>43</sup>

Although Schopenhauer's thought influenced some important artists and intellectuals including Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche, his pessimism was generally out of joint with the optimism of liberal culture. Nevertheless, one aspect of his thought is particularly important for the philosophy of religion: Like Feuerbach before and Nietzsche after him, he did not identify religion with some supposed “natural religion” nor with theism. All three critics were aware that there were a variety of religions that should be appraised differently. Schopenhauer had read deeply in the Upanishads and was aware that some Buddhism was atheistic; Nietzsche was fascinated by Buddhism because he thought it was a genuinely nihilistic religion; and Feuerbach not only was a student of ancient Greek religion but had read widely in the history of religion as well as Christian theology. Nor did they simply dismiss religion as a product of fear and superstition, as was prevalent in the eighteenth century. In fact, all three critics of religion held that the religions were products of powerful psychological and emotional forces and should be subtly interpreted and not be rejected wholesale. This is not a trivial point because in so doing they broke with the still all-too-prevalent assumption in modern Western philosophy that the principle subject matter of the philosophy of religion is the analysis and evaluation of the claims of theism.

Nietzsche's theory of the origins and persistence of religion is part of his larger and complex view concerning the relationships among human cognitive beliefs, systems of valuations or “moralities,” and the “will to power.” Although he polemicized against Darwin, he was profoundly indebted to him in one respect: he argued that all of our philosophical, moral, and religious systems served some function in the struggle for existence and, hence, are to be understood and interpreted in this broader context. Our basic categories of thought such as “cause,” “ego,” and “thing” are not, as Kant taught, fundamental categories of rationality as such but “fictions” that have emerged over millennia as the species attempted through trial and error to simplify and schematize the world of becoming.

Even though these “fictions” constitute the foundations of our thought, they do not necessarily tell us anything about “reason itself” or the structures of reality. But the inherent tendency of reason is to reify these fictions and to ignore the senses that perceive becoming. The reason, reflecting on what Nietzsche called the “metaphysics of language,” engages in a “crude fetishism” in which abstractions are reified into agents. The reason slips a doer behind everything done. “Reason

<sup>43</sup> Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, II. 392.

in language," he wrote, "oh, what an old deceptive female [*Weibsperson*] she is! I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar."<sup>44</sup>

Throughout his writings, Nietzsche was preoccupied with the question why the human mind is bewitched by these abstractions and takes them to be the key to a true world behind the apparent world. He argued that Plato was the first to systematize this bewitchment, and it was then incorporated into Christianity, which might be said to be the "Platonism for 'the people' (*Volk*)."<sup>45</sup> This bewitchment, he believed, has led to an imaginary teleology and an entire discourse built on fictions and abstractions.

Nietzsche attempted to explain this bewitchment many times, not always consistently, but the dominant conclusion he drew was that it arises from the suffering caused by a world of becoming and change. The human organism, longing for some surcease from this suffering, creates a world of being that does not change. This longing recapitulates what Nietzsche called the "logic of morality," namely, our instinctual reasoning that because some state of affairs should not have been permitted, there must exist some better state of affairs. Suffering inspires this wish, but in doing so it also reflects a rejection of the world of becoming that makes one suffer.

It was Nietzsche's unique attitude toward suffering and evil that distinguishes him from most other critics of Christianity. Most critics of Christianity have regarded the existence of suffering and evil as the Achilles heel of the traditional Christian belief in a creator that is both benevolent and all-powerful. Nietzsche, by contrast, does not argue that suffering is an objection to Christianity; rather, it is an objection to Christianity that it cannot accept the suffering of a world of becoming and tries to give it a meaning by positing a changeless true world. Indeed, Christianity may be seen as the institutionalization of what Nietzsche called the "ascetic ideal," which appears again and again in human history and which is usually embodied in the priestly class.

Characteristically, Nietzsche wanted to know why this ascetic ideal and its embodiment in the priest have appeared so often in human history, and the answer he gave is one of his most original ideas and the key to his dialectical criticism of Christianity. He argued that if the priest appears so often in human civilization it must be because he performs some important curative function in human life; indeed, that the ascetic ideal is somehow an artifice for the preservation of life. What function could this be? The answer, Nietzsche suggested, is that in every society the sick (weak) constitute a danger to the healthy. They are

<sup>44</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 483. Nietzsche, SW 6:78.

<sup>45</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1966), 3. Nietzsche, SW 5:12.

the hotbeds of resentment and cause the healthy to doubt their own strength. The victory of the early (weak) Christians over the noble Romans was an example of this. Consequently, it is important that the healthy should not administer to the sick, that there should be an intermediary. It is the historical mission of the priest to be this intermediary. He is to defend the herd and to alter the direction of its resentment. He accomplishes this not only by offering the herd a reason for its suffering, but by prescribing religious practices and enthusiasms that serve as a kind of anesthesia. One might say that he gives them a name and a meaning for their distress. He provides a religious interpretation of the bad conscience.<sup>46</sup>

The ascetic priest, then, represents the curative instinct of life itself. By exercising this therapeutic function he may be considered a physician. He has provided a meaning to life, an answer to the question "why do I suffer?" Nevertheless, he is not a true physician because he only treats suffering and does not get at its cause. Indeed, even though in one sense he has improved humanity, he has also, paradoxically, made it sicker because he has merely represented "life's nausea and disgust with life ... masked by, dressed up as, faith in 'another' or 'better' life."<sup>47</sup> Christianity, Nietzsche argued, has turned the world into a hospital in which everyone is sick and requires a divine physician.

It is in this context that one should understand Nietzsche's attitude toward Buddhism in contrast to Christianity. The Buddha also saw suffering as the problem of existence, and in this sense Buddhism and Christianity are both nihilistic and decadent religions. Nevertheless, Nietzsche argued, Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity. It has eliminated the concept of God as well as the notion of a world behind the world, a metaphysics. It does not try to explain suffering by the doctrine of sin but simply claims, "I suffer," and offers a technique to deal with it, a type of inner withdrawal or cauterization of the instincts. This can hardly be called a vigorous affirmation of life, but at least it does not posit another world in which suffering ceases to exist. It is a religion for those gracious and gentle races who have become very spiritual and excessively susceptible to pain. It is a way of leading them back to cheerfulness.

Nietzsche was in one important respect a far more radical critic than Feuerbach because he rejected not only Christian theological beliefs but those ideals of justice and equality that he believed were the shadowy legacy of Christianity. He was contemptuous, for example, of writers like George Eliot, John Stuart Mill, and David Friedrich Strauss who rejected Christianity but attempted to salvage

<sup>46</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), Third Essay. Nietzsche, SW 5:339–412.

<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1967), 23. Nietzsche, SW 1:18.

some form of its ethic. He challenged Strauss, for example, to show how one could hold any notion of equality after Darwin. Indeed, he argued that Christian morality was essentially built upon the virtue of pity, a “virtue” that violates the biological law of selection. “It preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends those who have been disinherited and condemned by life; and by the abundance of the failures of all kinds which it keeps alive, it gives life itself a gloomy and questionable aspect.”<sup>48</sup> It is the practice of nihilism.

Nietzsche’s polemic against the morality of the West, whether Christian or secular, finally led him to the even more radical conclusion that at the root of Western civilization is the conviction that human existence itself must be justified in moral terms, that human life has meaning only if morality has some metaphysical foundation. Nietzsche envisioned a new person who would affirm life despite its pain and suffering and its indifference to the deepest wishes of humankind. The measure of one’s strength would be the degree to which one simply acknowledges the terrifying nature of life and does not seek some resolution of it. If life is to be justified at all, Nietzsche concluded, it can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon.

With this conclusion, Nietzsche thought he had articulated a truly anti-Christian and antimoral ideal but an ideal that, paradoxically, allowed him the ability to affirm everything and hence condemn nothing, not even religion. “I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati* ... I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse.... I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.”<sup>49</sup>

## V

Looking back on these challenges, what stands out is that both the nineteenth-century critic of religion and the believer shared two fundamental presuppositions: that there is truth, and that one has a moral obligation to embrace this truth however unpleasant it may be if there are good reasons for doing so. Without these two presuppositions it is difficult to account for the fact that religious doubt and unbelief were once regarded as matters of intellectual integrity. This was especially true of the Victorians, although one can see it also in other epochs, for example, in the letters of the youthful Schleiermacher protesting to his father against the heteronomy of having to believe what did not seem true to him.

<sup>48</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 573. Nietzsche, SW 6:173.

<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, bk. IV, par. 276. Nietzsche, SW 3:521.

It was because religious apologists partially recognized this problem that, like Newman, they argued that the reason was not competent to judge certain propositions. Even Nietzsche, whose perspectivism seems to encourage relativism, attacked Christianity because it corrupted that sense of truth that demands of the free spirit that it make every yes and no a matter of conscience.<sup>50</sup>

Neither of these presuppositions is universally shared in the Western intellectual communities of the twenty-first century. As regards religion, many have embraced what Philip Rieff once called “the triumph of the therapeutic,” the attitude that religious faiths are therapies and are to be judged in terms of their ability “to get a person through the night,” so to speak. They are not matters that are to be argued about or for which conflicting truth claims are even relevant. There are still others who regard themselves as “postmodern” and who argue more radically that the idea of truth and its universality is an untenable notion, that what we regard as true is a function of the perspective of the communities in which we live, and that there is no beatific perspective. Everyone has his or her presuppositions, it is said, the religious believer as well as the atheist and the agnostic. Interestingly, it was Nietzsche, who criticized Christianity for its corruption of the truth, who introduced this notion of perspective. In this sense he may be said to mark the end of the century.

There are, of course, still both critics of religion and believers who do not regard the religions merely as therapies and who believe that their cognitive structure is essential to them. Moreover, some of them still believe that “yes” and “no” are matters of conscience, and for this reason they look back on the conflicts of the nineteenth century with a degree of nostalgia.

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<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, 632. Nietzsche, SW 6:230.



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## THREE TYPES OF SPECULATIVE RELIGION

STEPHEN CRITES

There were numerous reformist efforts in religion before and during the nineteenth century, particularly among religious liberals who rejected biblical literalism, institutional authoritarianism, and theological supernaturalism. But the most philosophically important types of liberal revisionism were “speculative,” in a specific sense of the term. Though it is often used more loosely, its precise sense rests on the metaphor of the mirror (Latin *speculum*) reflecting and conforming its image to what enters its visual field. In speculative religion this visual metaphor is extended to the direct reflection of the divine in the human mind or will. Speculation is not just thinking *about* a putatively divine or absolute being. It is a reflexivity conforming thought and sensibility to what is divine.

The metaphor of speculation was common in late classical and medieval thought, particularly in neo-Platonic philosophy and Augustinian theology, as the mirroring of a prototypical reality in the mind or God in the soul. The Spinozistic intuition of the one substance, or the intellectual love of God, is speculative in this sense. Hegel introduced speculation into nineteenth-century philosophy, and others, not necessarily using the term, employed recognizable types of such speculative thinking in their conceptions of religion. Speculative religion does not proceed from alleged revelatory or miraculous events in history, though it may inform an interpretation of traditional teachings. Neither does it employ inferential reasoning from natural phenomena in the manner of deistic “natural religion.” Its reflexivity distinguishes it from the epistemic dualism of subject and object characteristic of empiricism: hence the disdain of empiricists for “mere speculation.” It is admittedly not the aim of speculative thinking to provide information about the empirical world, but rather to reflect what may be of ultimate interest to human self-understanding.

This chapter will undertake to identify and compare three of the most influential types of speculative thinking in religion distinctive to the period under review. Major attention will be given to the origin of each type in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy between the 1780s and the first years of the nineteenth century, in which exponents of the three types interacted in ways that bring out

most explicitly both the differences and the affinities among them. But all three types remained deeply in the grain of religious commitment in northern Europe and North America through much of the nineteenth century.

### THE RELIGION OF MORALITY

Among literate eighteenth- and nineteenth-century folk otherwise skeptical of received religious teachings, nothing was more common than a religion of morality. Many thought that a broadly Judeo-Christian morality was the only really convincing aspect of their religious legacy. But there were at least two ways a religion of morality could be construed: It could mean that morality is sustainable (at least for the masses) only by the authority and sanctions provided by religion. Morality must be divinely commanded, and without belief in a day of reckoning beyond the grave there would be no ultimate restraint on human waywardness.

Or a religion of morality could, on the contrary, be derived from morality itself. That is the speculative position, formulated by Immanuel Kant. To base morality on divine command and religious authority, Kant argued, would be “heteronomy”: the servile submission of human beings to forces beyond their own rational nature. Such an alien basis for conduct is not moral at all. Truly moral agents are “autonomous,” committed to principles of action founded on their own self-legislating reason. They will to do what they are rationally convinced is right, and they do it *because* they are convinced it is right, not to earn extrinsic rewards or to avoid punishments. So morality is in no way dependent on religious beliefs. Yet Kant insists that it necessarily gives rise to a type of religion, or what he calls a “rational faith” in God. It is a *faith*, because it is an act of will unsupported by empirical grounds. It is *rational* because this act of will is logically implied in the agent’s willing of what is morally right. Morality motivates religion, not the reverse.<sup>1</sup> This derivation of religion is the speculative moment in Kant’s complex system of thought.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant banished “speculative” thinking from his carefully restricted region of proper knowledge, for metaphysical or theological construction addresses theoretical issues that cannot be resolved by appeal to any possible sensuous experience. Such supersensuous putative realities as God,

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [hereafter Kant, Ak], 6:4–6. Translation by George Di Giovanni in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), which carries the pagination of the Ak edition in its margins.

the free will, and the immortal soul cannot be objects of any empirical subject and the epistemic dualism of subject and object conditions all experience. Though their reality cannot be affirmed on that basis, it cannot be denied either, since empirical knowledge does not extend to noumenal reality: beyond what can properly be known Kant leaves “a place for faith.”<sup>2</sup>

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) Kant seeks to fill this place. He argues that a rational faith in God, freedom, and immortality is a *moral* necessity: morally committed persons necessarily *will* that they occupy that empty place beyond the limits of knowledge. Reason, not in its theoretical but in its practical employment, must “postulate” all three as implicit in the moral will.

Kant’s view of morality has such ramifications because it is so radical. Without attempting to expound the details of Kant’s rationalistic moral theory, let us simply say that it calls for a fundamental change in human *motivation* from its native egocentrism (“self-love”) to an impartial willing of what is right for all parties to any situation. The antithesis between the good and the evil will is so stark that Kant compares it to the difference the religious imagination draws between heaven and hell.<sup>3</sup> The conversion to the good will, open to every rational being, is not completed all at once; the good will must engage in a lifelong struggle against what Kant calls “the propensity to evil in human nature.”<sup>4</sup> Yet the first step in this struggle is already a radical reorientation, the birth of moral autonomy.

Only when this step is taken does the moral agent have grounds in her own practical reason for asserting the freedom of the will as the condition for its possibility. That is already a speculative step beyond empirical knowledge. Kant himself does not refer to this step as speculative, because he generally uses this term for the misguided effort to extend knowledge beyond its proper empirical grounds, and there is no such effort here. One cannot *know* the will is free, because one never has empirical grounds for claiming cognitive certainty that motivation is moral; any act can be explained by nonmoral motivations. Yet it seems appropriate to call people’s belief that they are free moral agents speculative in its proper sense. They cannot claim cognitive proof of it, but it is the self-testimony of their souls. This testimony cannot, by the very nature of its claim, be a conclusion from sensory experience; either it is illusory or it issues from their noumenal selves. It is the moral certainty that funds both the self-understanding and the practical reason of a moral agent, for the person who believes he can act morally necessarily believes in the free will as well, as the necessary condition for a moral will.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Translation: *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B XXX.

<sup>3</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:60n.

<sup>4</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:29–32. By this “propensity” Kant does not mean bodily desires and impulses, but the egocentric orientation of the “freely acting” will (Kant, Ak 6:34–5).

Practical reason asserts the free will on the basis of the morally good will, not the reverse,<sup>5</sup> for without the freedom of the will our belief that we can act for moral reasons, not merely as the effect of causes, would be an illusion. To believe we are free does not extend our knowledge, but it is a speculative implication of morality, reflexively grounded in the moral will itself.

Kant argues that there is a similar reflexivity in the moral agent's rational faith in God and immortality. This is no "moral proof," as it is sometimes misleadingly called. Kant knew that it would be easy to refute the arguments he offers in support of all three of these "postulates of practical reason."<sup>6</sup> His most fundamental point is perhaps logically his weakest: The rational commitment of the will to its moral duty necessarily implies that it also wills that there should be an entire world order founded on morally rational principles. Now the agent should herself act on moral principle, should do her duty, whether such a moral world order actually exists or not. Furthermore, her will is in control of her own deed. But it cannot entirely control even the consequences of her deed, much less create a moral world order. That such a moral world order might actually, indeed noumenally, exist, contrary to all phenomenal experience, there would have to be a God possessing both a morally perfect ("holy") will and power limited only by the free will of moral agents. So to the extent that the moral agent wills to do his own duty he *also* wills that such a God exist!<sup>7</sup>

To the extent, furthermore, that he wills to do his duty he is committed to furthering the world's moral order in every way that lies in his power. Of course, his contribution to that end is necessarily small, and his commitment imperfect. Hence one more factor is implicit in the moral will: it wills its own progress toward moral perfection, and since its perfectibility is limited in this life, it wills its own immortality, not as a reward for virtue but in order to achieve perfection!<sup>8</sup> A weak argument for immortality, perhaps, but it is "speculative" in the strongest sense: the human will develops into the mirror image of the holy will of God.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [hereafter KpV], Kant, Ak 5:4–7, 96–100. Translation: *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), which also supplies the Ak pagination.

<sup>6</sup> KpV, Kant, Ak 5:121–34.

<sup>7</sup> Specifically, Kant speaks of the moral necessity of willing the "highest good" (*Summum Bonum*), a world order in which happiness is proportionate to each person's moral goodness, or worthiness to be happy. But he virtually equates this *Summum Bonum* with an "intelligible world" (cf. Plato's divided line in *Republic* Book X) beyond the world of our experience and ruled by the holy will of God.

<sup>8</sup> KpV, Kant, Ak 5:121–4. This future life is more akin to purgatory than to paradise. On similar grounds, Gotthold Lessing, like Origen, found support for the ancient doctrine of the transmigration of souls: we'll keep coming back till we get it right! See "The Education of the Human Race," pars. 92–100, in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1956, reprinted 1967), 97–8.

This appears to be the sense in which the religion of morality “is the recognition of all duties as divine commands.”<sup>9</sup> The moral person does not do her duty because it is commanded by God (heteronomy), but just to the extent that she perfects her autonomous moral will it *reflects* the divine will, for Kant refuses on moral grounds to credit any concept of God that abrogates the moral autonomy of the human being. The only perfect obedience to God is to achieve moral autonomy, to obey the self-legislative law of reason alone. A key to this apparent paradox is Kant’s insistence that the existence of a free moral agent as such is not *caused* by God (or by anything else).

The human being must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil. These two must be an effect of his free power of choice, for otherwise they could not be imputed to him and, consequently, he could be neither *morally* good nor evil.<sup>10</sup>

Moral agents cannot be created in the sense of being effects of a divine cause. Rather, the holy will of God is the measure of the moral will’s progress: the moral will cannot become holy, but it strives to approximate the holy will within its finite limits. It is related to God not as effect to cause but as matter to form: or in Aristotelian terms, God is not the efficient cause of the moral will but its final cause, like Aristotle’s own prime mover. To believe in such a God, and in the free will and immortality, Kant insists, is for the moral will an act of obedience to “an inexorable command of reason.” Bound by the pure moral law,

the righteous man may say: *I will that there be a God*, that my existence in this world be also an existence in a pure world of the understanding outside the system of natural connections, and finally that my duration be endless. I stand by this and will not give up this belief, for this is the only case where my interest inevitably determines my judgment because I will not yield anything of this interest; I do so without attention to sophistries, however little I may be able to answer them or oppose them with others more plausible.<sup>11</sup>

In this striking passage, it is evident how much moral passion is invested in Kant’s religion of morality, rational though it be. The rational faith rests on an act of will that no mere sensuous experience can displace.

In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), Kant brings this passionate moral rationalism to a remarkable interpretation of Christian teachings.

<sup>9</sup> KpV, Kant, Ak 5:129; also *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:153–4.

<sup>10</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:44; see also 142–3. The Scholastic doctrine of God as first efficient cause is also undermined by Kant’s view that causality, a category of the understanding, is only applicable to empirical objects, not to noumenal beings. A moral agent, such as God, can exist only as a noumenon. Both may be nonexistent, but they cannot be mere empirical objects.

<sup>11</sup> KpV, Kant, Ak 5:143. Emphasis added.

He might have titled it "The Christian Gospel Construed within the Boundaries of Practical Reason." Its four parts offer strictly moral interpretations of original sin, Christology, the coming Kingdom of God (i.e., an "ethical commonwealth"), and a doctrine of the church. The Christological part two supports and elaborates our reading of the three postulates of practical reason in the second *Critique*. Here Kant expresses the speculative reflexivity of moral will and holy will in what he calls "the personified idea of the good principle." This is the idea of "*Humanity ... in its full moral perfection*." It is the ideal prototype of "human being, alone pleasing to God," that is, as God wills it to be. This prototype is lodged in universal reason, human and divine, and to it are ascribed traditional titles of the second person of the Trinity in the prologue to the Gospel According to John and the Nicene Creed: the word (logos) eternally with God, through whom all things were made, the only-begotten Son of the Father, and others.<sup>12</sup> But there is one significant departure from the traditional credo: the word did not, by a divine act, become flesh and dwell among us in a single historical individual. Rather, its incarnation is the *moral* task reason assigns all human beings.

Now it is our universal human duty to *elevate* ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i.e. to the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity, and for this the very idea, which is presented to us by reason for emulation, can give us force.<sup>13</sup>

God may will the materialization of this ideal prototype (it is indeed the goal of creation), but only human beings can, by the exercise of free will, *become* the perfected humanity. Commitment to this task is what Kant calls "the *practical faith in this Son of God*." This faith differs fundamentally from the traditional Christian belief that the Son of God has appeared historically in the person of Jesus. This practical faith can only be self-fulfilling. Even if there had been a historical appearance of prototypical humanity in an individual, "the idea is present as model already in our reason."<sup>14</sup>

All the traditional articles of the Christian creed are subjected to a similar displacement from divine acts to human moral tasks. To all scriptural teachings Kant brings a decisive hermeneutical principle applicable to any received tradition or alleged revelation. Positive religions have been established by historical circumstance rather than by reason, but they have a strong hold on their devotees, reinforced by colorful rites and legends that appeal to the senses. So they "must be used" if their devotees are to become committed to moral duty.

Now to unite the foundation of a moral faith . . . with such an empirical faith which, to all appearances, chance has dealt to us, we require an interpretation of the revelation

<sup>12</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:60–1.

<sup>13</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:61.

<sup>14</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:62.

we happen to have, i.e. a thoroughgoing understanding of it in a sense that harmonizes with the universal practical rules of a pure religion of reason. For the theoretical element of ecclesiastical faith cannot be of moral interest to us, if it does not work toward the fulfillment of all human duties as divine commands (which constitutes the essential of every religion). This interpretation may often appear to us as forced, in view of the text (of the revelation), and be often forced in fact; yet, if the text can at all bear it, it must be preferred to a literal interpretation that either contains absolutely nothing for morality, or even works counter to its incentives.<sup>15</sup>

This Procrustean principle for the interpretation of sacred texts presupposes a distinction that figures centrally in the last two parts of Kant's *Religion*: between the "true," "pure," "moral," "natural," "rational" religion that furnishes the basis of this hermeneutic and the merely "ecclesiastical," "historical," "empirical," "positive" religion to which it is applied. Sometimes the two seem simply antithetical. For practical reason the fundamental difference is self-evident:

Apart from a good life-conduct, anything which the human being supposes that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious delusion and counterfeit service of God.<sup>16</sup>

By this criterion, all Christian creed and cultus, as well as all non-Christian religions, are alike consigned to pseudoreligious delusion. The "shaman of the Tunguses and the European prelate" and the Connecticut Puritan, for all their apparent differences, "all equally belong to one and the same class, namely of those who place their service of God in something ... which cannot by itself constitute a better human being."<sup>17</sup>

Yet, surprisingly, Kant declares that the Christian religion alone, "of all the public religions so far known," expresses the type of the "moral religion."<sup>18</sup> It later becomes clear that this is so insofar as it reflects the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, which Kant quotes in detail as "pure doctrines of reason ... that carry their own proof."<sup>19</sup> Jesus is not a unique incarnation of the ideal prototypical humanity, but in his life and death he conforms to the prototype and in his teachings presents "a complete religion, which can be proposed to all human beings comprehensibly and convincingly through their own reason."<sup>20</sup> Alas, this rational, "natural" religion of the founder is later corrupted by

<sup>15</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:110. As Kant points out, sacred legends of many peoples, Greeks and Romans, Jews and Christians, Moslems and Hindus, have long been subjected to such morally edifying interpretations by "rational and thoughtful teachers of the people" (110–11). That was the point of allegorical interpretation in late antiquity.

<sup>16</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:170.

<sup>17</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:176.

<sup>18</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:51–2.

<sup>19</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:159–62.

<sup>20</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:162.



“revealed” principles of an ecclesiastical faith that have to be inculcated because they are not inherent in universal practical reason. Though Kant fulminates at length against such developments, he carefully considers the possibility that so long as the original, moral faith is associated with the ecclesiastical faith, at least in its scriptures, the ecclesiastical faith might serve as the “vehicle” for the eventual ascendancy of the moral faith – to the point, finally, at which the vehicle might be dispensed with entirely. Such a “gradual transition within ecclesiastical faith toward the exclusive dominion of pure religious faith” Kant calls “the coming of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>21</sup>

Shortly before Kant’s *Religion* was published, an anonymous work appeared with the Kantian-sounding title *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792). Heavily dependent on Kant’s second *Critique*, particularly the procedure of deriving religious doctrines as postulates of practical reason, this text was first mistaken for a new work by Kant, who set the record straight but also praised it. The author was the young Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who had been influenced by Lessing and Spinoza but had found his true master in Kant. Fichte cautiously extended the range of religious doctrines derivable from the divine authority of the moral law, an extension that encouraged Christian apologists to buttress many other “revealed truths” as postulates of the moral will. But Fichte, appointed to the philosophical faculty of the prestigious University of Jena, proved to be no Christian apologist, and his philosophical lectures were wildly popular. His virtual equation of God with a self-willed moral world order raised severe doubts about his orthodoxy. Furthermore, his radically democratic politics at the height of the French Revolution provoked misgivings among the conservative authorities, and his moralistic public criticism of student behavior irked the fraternities. He began to be accused of atheism by Lutheran theologians, setting off a controversy (the *Atheismusstreit*) that, together with his moral and political pugnacity, resulted in his dismissal from the Jena faculty in 1799.

In his *Wissenschaftslehre*,<sup>22</sup> first published in 1794 with revised versions to follow, the speculative moment in Kant’s second *Critique* morphed into a full-blown metaphysics based on practical reason. He derived all reality from an absolute or infinite self-positing ego. In the self-affirmation of this absolute ego, it “posits” a finite material other (i.e., the natural world) that Fichte called the non-ego, a terminology that emphasized its lack of any independent reality. It exists only as a field of activity of the ego. In addition, the absolute ego posits a finite ego (the human) in opposition to the non-ego. The moral task of the finite ego is to

<sup>21</sup> *Religion*, Kant, Ak 6:106–7, 115–24.

<sup>22</sup> In Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitsky (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1962–).

struggle against its domination by the non-ego and to bring its will into harmony with the absolute ego. Though Fichte never identified the absolute ego with God, he did give it an increasingly religious significance in a “rational” interpretation of Christianity.

#### ROMANTIC NATURE MYSTICISM

In 1799 the thirty-one-year-old Friedrich Schleiermacher published his first major work, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. A Protestant clergyman, Schleiermacher was already a man of many parts. Drawn to the new romantic style in poetry and music, he was an active participant in Berlin’s romantic circle and a contributor to the journal *Athenaeum*, edited by the brothers August and Friedrich Schlegel. He was also a serious student of philosophy, who during his twenties had conducted critical studies in Kant’s moral and religious writings. The “cultured despisers” of religion to whom his *Speeches* were addressed were primarily his companions in the romantic circle. He portrays himself as sharing their contempt for much of what passes for religion, but he attempts to convince them that true religion is a far cry from what they despise, and something akin to their own sensibility.

It is totally distinct from either theoretical knowledge or morality. Schleiermacher agrees with Kant in distinguishing sharply between the two and insisting that as moral agents we stand in a different relation to the world than as knowing or experiencing subjects. But both morality and knowledge are necessary for a fulfilled human life, and so is religion as a third relation of a human being to the world, distinct from either of the other two.<sup>23</sup> Religion is not just popularized metaphysics or any other sort of knowledge, and to confuse it with morals is the ruination of both. Worst of all is the “poorly stitched together fragments of metaphysics and morals that are called rational Christianity.”<sup>24</sup> Written on the heels of the *Atheismstreit*, the *Speeches* reflect no sympathy for the defenders of theism who had hounded Fichte out of Jena, yet they contain many barbed allusions to what the author considers Fichte’s confusion of religion with an idealistic metaphysics based on morals. “Idealism will destroy the universe by appearing to fashion it; it will degrade it to a mere allegory, to an empty silhouette

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter Ihren Verächtern* (original ed., Berlin, 1799) [hereafter *Reden*, O], 24–33, 48–63. Translation: *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 89–92, 101–8. Crouter, in 18–30 of his excellent introduction, details Schleiermacher’s critical engagement with Kant’s work in a series of studies published in the years preceding the appearance of *Speeches*.

<sup>24</sup> *Reden*, O 25; Crouter trans., 89.

of our own limitedness.”<sup>25</sup> Schleiermacher here refers to Fichte’s reduction of the natural world to the non-ego emanating from the absolute ego as a mere opposition to be overcome. He joins this rebuke of idealism to a rhapsody on “holy, rejected Spinoza,” whose substance-philosophy Fichte had assessed as “consistent dogmatism,” a system of nature without ideality. Schleiermacher, on the contrary, declares, “The high world spirit permeated him, the infinite was his beginning and end, the universe his only and eternal love.” In singing of Spinoza’s love for the universe (Spinoza called it the intellectual love of God), Schleiermacher strikes the chord that epitomizes his own view of the essence of religion. He claims for this love, furthermore, a reciprocity that precisely expresses the speculative: Spinoza “was reflected in the eternal world and saw how he too was its most lovable mirror.”<sup>26</sup>

This evocation of Spinoza occurs in Schleiermacher’s second Speech, “On the Essence of Religion” (with which we are primarily concerned). Now from this essence many diverse paths proceed, each with its historically developing community possessing distinctive traditions and practices. This is the theme of the fifth Speech, “On the Religions.” No one simply practices the essence of religion! But this essence is no abstract distillation of the religions either. It is the vital source apart from which there is no genuine religion at all. This is what the impassioned speaker undertakes to disclose in his second Speech to the cultured despisers. It has nothing to do with mythology, metaphysics, or morals.

Religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes

to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe’s own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe’s immediate influences in childlike passivity.<sup>27</sup>

This trenchant, even formulaic passage is at the same time evocative rather than discursive, like many in the second Speech. Rather than quoting more such passages, we will attend to the three salient terms in this one: intuition, feeling, and universe (*Anschauung*, *Gefühl*, *Universum*).

*Universum* has a Spinozistic connotation, as Schleiermacher’s remarks about Spinoza suggest. It is not the aggregate sum of everything that exists or is

<sup>25</sup> *Reden*, O 54; Crouter trans., 103–4.

<sup>26</sup> *Reden*, O 54–5; Crouter trans., 104. There was a lively revival of interest in Spinoza, among romantics and others, during the late eighteenth century. Schleiermacher reflects the romantic rehabilitation of Spinoza, shorn of his rationalism, as one who had grasped the divinity of the natural universe. As against the Enlightenment’s reduction of nature to an inert material moved by mechanical forces, this romantic Spinozism celebrated it as a living whole of boundless fecundity, at once maternal and erotic.

<sup>27</sup> *Reden*, O 50; Crouter trans., 102.

empirically available (what Spinoza called *natura naturata*, or nature natured). It is an original, seamless unity, like Spinoza's one all-encompassing substance (*natura naturans*, or nature naturing). Schleiermacher refers to "nature" and "the universe" interchangeably. "Religion," he says, "lives its whole life in nature, but in the infinite nature of totality, the one and all."<sup>28</sup> Spinoza, however, referred to the one substance as God, and our young clergyman, interestingly, does not. His Speech concerns *religion*, not theology. Religion does not necessarily, or essentially, entail a God. As Schleiermacher says toward the end of this Speech, "whether we have a God as part of our intuition [of the universe] depends on the direction of our imagination."<sup>29</sup> Religion in essence is not yet articulated into such issues as whether there is a God, but the universe is in itself a "divine life and activity."

Spinoza considered that the *intuitus* of the one substance is an *intellectual* intuition, the highest act of reason. His terminology may have influenced Schleiermacher, but in the *Speeches* "intuition" is entirely sensuous, an apprehension not mediated by concepts, but not yet articulated into particular sensations, an "immediate perception" of each thing as part of a fluid whole. Indeed, the one who intuits is also part of the whole, at first entirely passive to the activity of the whole upon him, not yet self-conscious. The intuition is "prior" to the differentiation into empirical subject and object, prior not in time but in the order of apprehension. The experienced world of determinate objects is constantly arising out of an indeterminate broth in which there are neither discrete objects nor experiencing subjects, neither creatures nor gods, neither concepts nor perceptions. This broth is the universe as "totality," to which intuition is directed. "All intuition proceeds from the influence of the intuited on the one who intuits, from an original and independent action of the former, which is then grasped, apprehended, and conceived by the latter according to one's own nature."<sup>30</sup> In the indeterminate precondition to experience, the one who intuits is an undifferentiated part of the whole, acting only insofar as it is acted upon. But its intuition *then* becomes active, grasping from its own distinct perspective the totality that had formed it. Schleiermacher suggests that the devout person is aware of his

<sup>28</sup> *Reden*, O 51; Crouter trans., 102. In Lessing's deathbed conversation with Jacobi, describing himself as a Spinozist, he said that he knew no other God than "έν και παν" – one and all. This became a popular slogan among intellectually venturesome young Germans of the 1790s, and Schleiermacher may be alluding to it.

<sup>29</sup> *Reden*, O 128–9; Crouter trans., 138. This remark assumes that intuition is, for any particular person or community, shaped by imagination, "which is the highest and most original element in us." If one imagines oneself to be a free being (as morality assumes, but essential religion does not), then correlatively "imagination will probably personify [as a free being] the spirit of the universe and you will have a God." But the *Speeches* grant that an atheist can be religious.

<sup>30</sup> *Reden*, O 55; Crouter trans., 104.

limited perspective and realizes that there are other perspectives just as valid that he cannot share.<sup>31</sup>

"Finally, to complete the general picture of religion, recall that every intuition is, by its very nature, connected with a *feeling*."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in the nascent subject's participation in the whole, intuition and feeling are indistinguishable, but they arise as complementary motions insofar as the devout person assumes the state of distinct self-consciousness. Then intuition actively apprehends and feeling passively appropriates, incorporating the intuited "actions of the universe" inwardly in the mode of sheer affect. In the first Speech Schleiermacher had prepared the cultured despisers for this interaction of intuition and feeling by endorsing a widely held assumption, which they share, that everything in nature and in art reflects the fusion of two antithetical forces. The one force extends itself actively, flowing outward; the other draws everything external into itself, like the heart's systole and diastole.<sup>33</sup> Now Schleiermacher appeals to this principle in his evocation of the twin forces of intuition and feeling in the human subject's religious apprehension of the universe. Within the indeterminate state from which every determinate experience arises, their penetration and appropriation are also indistinguishable, but as two distinct motions they arise out of this indeterminacy. Then feeling is the afterglow or the continuing resonance of the whole in the sensibility of the individual. Even when the active force expresses itself in freely chosen moral actions, "religious feelings should accompany every human deed like holy music."<sup>34</sup> The metaphor is suggestive. *Anschauen* (to intuit) literally means "to look at"; though it is not merely visual here, it still has the connotation of being focused, directed at its object. But sound is encompassing: *Gefühl*, like music, resounds from the surrounding space through the entire body. It accompanies intuition as it does action. Without feeling, intuition is "nothing," as is feeling without intuition; "both are therefore something only when and because they are originally one and unseparated."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Reden*, O 62–3; Crouter trans., 107–8.

<sup>32</sup> *Reden*, O 66; Crouter trans., 109. Emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> *Reden*, O 5–9; Crouter trans., 79–81. Crouter, in a footnote (79–80n6) offers several examples of this principle in eighteenth-century literary theory, philosophy, and physics, e.g., Goethe's *Diastole/Systole*, Schiller's *Formtrieb/Stofftrieb*, Schelling's *Anziehung/Zurückstossung*. The two forces are combined in various measures and manners, but Schleiermacher suggests that the great mediators between God and humanity, "true priests of the Most High," unite the two forces in a way that is most fruitful for the enlightenment of their brothers and sisters. Better still will be the time when this "holy fire" burns among all humankind without the need of such mediators (*Reden*, O 9–13; Crouter trans., 81–3).

<sup>34</sup> *Reden*, O 68; Crouter trans., 110. But moral action should not arise directly from religion. In the moral sphere freedom rules, and to act on so-called religious grounds is a fanatical confusion of the two spheres.

<sup>35</sup> *Reden*, O 73; Crouter trans. 112.

This observation leads the reader into what is perhaps the central, and certainly the most famous, passage in the text. Schleiermacher cannot directly describe the identity with the universe that is the mystical “essence” of religion. It is not an “experience”; since there is no subject/object duality there is not the epistemic distance that makes description possible, much less any sorting out into distinct objects. It is the speculative heart of Schleiermacher’s theory of religion, but it is not theoretical at all, but pure awareness and affect.

He evokes it in two ways. First, he draws an analogy with something he believes will produce a shock of recognition in the reader: with the indeterminate state that gives rise, he claims, to any perception at all, to that

first mysterious moment that occurs in every sensory perception, before intuition and feeling have separated, where sense and its objects have, as it were, flowed into one another and become one, before both turn back to their original position.

Has not the reader had an intimation of such a preperceptual state, this fluid mingling of sense with its object? Let him “hold on to it and also to recognize it again in the higher and divine religious activity of the mind.”<sup>36</sup>

Next, Schleiermacher introduces the erotic imagery that has been the resort of many spiritual writers before him. But for them the erotic was metaphor for the spiritual union with God. Schleiermacher insists that the self-forgetful union with the one-and-all “is not *like*” a fervent sexual embrace, “but it is itself” such an embrace. What begins as a sensuous image of the universe develops into a pure “form” that offers itself to the seeker’s embrace.

I embrace it, not as a shadow but as the holy essence itself. I lie on the bosom of the infinite world. At this moment I am its soul, for I feel all its powers and its infinite life as my own; at this moment it is my body, for I penetrate its muscles and its limbs as my own, and its innermost nerves move according to my sense and my presentiment as my own.<sup>37</sup>

The “form [*Gestalt*]” first presented itself as enticement, but then there is fusion into full union in which the universe is the lover’s body. Only when this *ecstasis* begins to fade does the *Gestalt* detach itself as a separate object of intuition.

<sup>36</sup> *Reden*, O 73; Crouter trans., 112.

<sup>37</sup> *Reden*, O 74; Crouter trans., 113. Crouter, who calls this the “love scene” passage, calls attention to Platonic allusions, e.g., “the Socratic ‘myth of the soul’ in *Phaedrus* 244–57, where sexual imagery expresses the union of passion and intellectual eros” (112n21). Schleiermacher was already a serious student of the Platonic dialogues, which he later translated into German, with commentaries. One might also compare the present passage to Diotima’s speech in *Symposium*: what begins as sensuous love for a body develops through image and form to the eros for beauty itself. (Both Platonic dialogues can be found in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989].)

With the slightest trembling the holy embrace is dispersed, and now for the first time the intuition stands before me as a separate form; I survey it, and it mirrors itself in my open soul like the image of the vanishing beloved in the awakened eye of a youth; now for the first time the feeling works its way up from inside and diffuses itself like the blush of shame and desire on his cheek. This moment is the highest flowering of religion. . . . This is the natal hour of everything living in religion.<sup>38</sup>

By this account, essential religion entails speculative reflexivity in the mode of sensuous immediacy, the antipode of the Kantian-Fichtean religion of morality. Regardless of whatever else it may entail under diverse cultural conditions, to be religious is to live on the frontier of the indeterminate, where the world, and the devout subject with it, is continually dissolving and taking form anew. Here the nuptial embrace and the natal hour coincide, for it is the place of cosmic engendering, where baptism is always by total immersion. Schleiermacher's vision of it resembles a creation story, such as the first chapter of Genesis, where a many-splendored world emerges from a watery chaos, except that it is without benefit of a transcendent creator, and the transition between chaos and world, world and chaos, is a perpetual oscillation. The religious subject, intuiting and feeling, is not only constantly present at the creation, but constantly being created, along with everything else.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's well-known note on imagination in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) reflects a cosmic outlook so similar to that of Schleiermacher's essential religion that the two accounts are mutually illuminating. Coleridge's thinking was many-sided and little troubled by the hobgoblin of consistency. Nature mysticism was one of its sides, and a weapon he deployed against the regnant empiricism, associationism, and utilitarianism of his native land. Like Schleiermacher he favored organic models over mechanical. Experience, for instance, is not just an aggregate of sense impressions mechanically related in an epistemic subject. In experience an infinite fluidity expresses itself in an organic concretion apprehended in an imaginative act.

Imagination was, therefore, regarded as the highest of human powers among the German romantics, with whom Coleridge was well acquainted. It had long been considered the mere recombination of "images" abstracted from perception and ledged in memory. Thus (in the hackneyed example) from the images of a horse's lower body and a man's upper body imagination creates the imaginary centaur. This the romantics dubbed the mere "reproductive" imagination, by contrast with the creative capacity they called "productive" imagination. Its

<sup>38</sup> *Reden*, O 74–5; Crouter trans., 113. As Crouter says (113n22), "Like Plato, Schleiermacher holds that one comes to know the 'essence' or 'nature' (*Wesen*) of a thing only in its manifestation in finite form (*Gestalt*). But that is, so to speak, the before and after. In the "erotic" moment there is not knowledge but sensuous fusion."

creativity was a metaphoric process of producing fresh-minted and interrelated forms out of the indeterminate preconditions of experience. This metaphoric process was a way of re-ignifying and experiencing the world afresh.

Coleridge relegated the reproductive imagination to the category of mere “fancy,” reserving the term “imagination” for its productive function. Fancy “has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites.” It deals, that is, with the objectified images and meanings of things that are commonly taken for granted, but it deploys and contextualizes them differently, to whimsical effect. “Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice.” Fancy puts a beard on the *Mona Lisa*, deals capriciously with the otherwise familiar. But like memory it “must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.”<sup>39</sup>

Imagination, on the contrary, is the mind’s descent into the fluidity underlying any objective world, in order to construct the world anew. This it does in two ways, which Coleridge calls primary and secondary imagination. Primary imagination is employed in perception itself, which is not the mere conscious registering of a world of things already formed. It actively forms its objects, not arbitrarily but artfully, as God is said to have done on the days of creation. Coleridge deals with it in a single cryptic but resonant sentence: “The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” It is not that human perception repeats mentally the forms that God created once and for all in reality. The “I AM” is the name the otherwise inscrutable and indefinable wills to be called (Exodus 3:14), who lets creatures be by calling them out of the fluid deeps: the I AM lets You Be (Genesis 1). That the act of creation is eternal implies that it is unending, and that human perception is its repetition in the finite mind may be construed to mean that we perceive by also constantly plumbing the fluid deeps for companions on whom to confer names and images, and perhaps love.

Be that as it may! *Secondary* imagination, the province of inspired poets and other masters of *poesis* (making), says Coleridge,

I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 1, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Bollingen Series 75 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 1:305. The brief remarks on imagination and fancy are appended to chap. 13.



*Poesis*, unlike perception, is a self-conscious, deliberate act. It does not make by forming entities directly from the cosmic broth but begins with objects already codified in a conventionally assembled world (itself the product of forgotten metaphors). These rigid “fixities and definites” the poet/maker plunges *back* into the cosmic broth, where they become plastic again, material out of which something new can be made. Secondary imagination

dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.<sup>40</sup>

The latter are fit only for fanciful entertainments. But the Coleridgean artist must remake herself in the very process of remaking her world. She must shake off “herself” in order to sink into the sea of indeterminacy where everything is still in formation. She does not simply copy things as they are but reconstructs them and establishes new connections among them, metaphors that reflect their common source in the indeterminate.

In similar fashion, though in other terms, that other archromantic, the young Schleiermacher, attempts to lead his religion-despising friends into its essence: into erotic union with the chaotic vitality of the infinite universe. The Coleridgean imagination, too, is productive because it is engendering. For both writers, the poetic and the religious are, therefore, in the closest proximity, because they have a common source.

There is much more to Schleiermacher’s highly original understanding of religion than his evocation of its essence. We must at least mention one important factor: He brings to his religious thought a thoroughly intersubjective, social understanding of the self, though that is not evident in the passages we have examined. He rejects any solitary worship of “external nature,” for “in order to intuit the world and to have religion, man must first have found humanity, and he finds it only in love,”<sup>41</sup> for we discover humanity only in intimate association with others. This commitment to the social self not only validates religious community, contrary to the radical individualism of many exponents of “experiential” religion: it may also offer a further clue concerning the eroticism we have found at its heart. Your nearest and dearest, after all, is the side of the universe turned toward you!

Schleiermacher went on to a career of great achievement and influence, including such important contributions to philosophy as his translations and expositions of the Platonic dialogues, his *Dialectics*, and the *Hermeneutics* that

<sup>40</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 1:304.

<sup>41</sup> *Reden*, O 88–9; Crouter trans., 120. This is a gloss on Genesis 2: in Eve, “flesh and bone of his bone,” Adam “discovered humanity, and in humanity the world.”

pioneered in interpretation theory as a philosophical discipline.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, he became the most influential theologian of liberal Protestantism in the nineteenth century. His theological development led to significant changes in subsequent editions (1806, 1821) of the *Speeches*, toning down some of the more venturesome passages and adding notes to bring the text more into conformity with his later theology.<sup>43</sup> Yet he did not basically disown the romantic *Speeches* with which he began. Even in *The Christian Faith*, his major theological work, he radically reoriented the interpretation of theological doctrines to their sources in “Christian religious affections.”

### TRANSCENDENTALISM

Transcendentalism in a manner combines our first two types of speculative religion. It is most popularly associated with the mid-nineteenth-century transcendentalists of New England, a circle of popular writers and lecturers who addressed many issues of the day. But what was specifically transcendentalist about them was the wedding of a high-minded moral idealism with a sense of oneness with nature. This coincidence of apparent opposites was a legacy of earlier German and British thought, the seeds of which were sown in post-Kantian philosophy generally, and particularly in F. W. J. Schelling’s early writing and in his collaboration with the young G.W. F. Hegel during the first two years of the nineteenth century.

The two had been friends since they were theological students in Tübingen in the early 1790s. Schelling was a prolific Wunderkind who began publishing philosophical treatises as a student. He joined Fichte on the philosophical faculty at Jena in 1799, at age twenty-three, and was considered Fichte’s disciple. Probably on his recommendation, Hegel was appointed docent at Jena in 1801. Though he was five years older than his friend, he had come later to serious philosophical studies and was for a time heavily under his precocious friend’s influence. By autumn 1801, the two friends, who were rooming together, decided to launch the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*. They hoped to welcome other authors, including Schleiermacher and Fichte, to its pages, but in the end the two editors wrote all the articles themselves – unsigned, as if they spoke with one voice! – until Schelling’s departure from Jena in 1803.

Schelling’s thought had always been protean and mercurial, and with this reunion with Hegel it entered a new phase, labeled Philosophy of Identity

<sup>42</sup> See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Hans-Joachim Birkner et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980–).

<sup>43</sup> See Crouter’s valuable account of revisions in the 1806 and 1821 editions, in his introduction to his translation of the *Speeches* of 1799, 55–73.

(*Identitätsphilosophie*). This new philosophy was articulated and defended in the *Critical Journal* and other current writings of both editors, and on its basis heavy polemics were launched against other positions. It is anticipated in many respects by Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800), but the new Philosophy of Identity broke sharply with Fichte.<sup>44</sup> Though this philosophy is primarily Schellingian, Hegel appears to have made many original contributions to it. During this brief period in their careers, the thinking of the young philosophers was largely formed in dialogue.

They agreed that the intellectual life of their age was riven by dualism, the reflection of a fragmented culture. God/world, science/art, knowledge/morals, ideality/nature, spirit/matter, faith/reason, subjectivity/objectivity, freedom/necessity, ego/non-ego: these are only a few of the dualisms the new philosophy bravely set out to overcome, in the interest of a coherent intellectual culture and an integrated life of the spirit. The task of philosophy was to show that what were being conceived as irreconcilable dualisms were in every case two sides of a single whole. To this end the new philosophy itself created, ironically, a duality between reason and understanding. The understanding (*Verstand*) was the analytic form of thought that formulated distinctions, vicious only when the distinctions hardened into dualism, but fruitful when they are grasped as constituents of an underlying whole. Reason (*Vernunft*) is the synthetic grasp of apparent opposites as reconcilable aspects of the whole. The solution was not to reduce one of a pair of putative opposites to the other, such as mind to matter (materialism) or matter to mind (idealism). That is just dogmatism. Reason preserves both in dynamic interplay, where each requires the other.

Reason is neither inductive nor deductive. Another name for it is "transcendental intuition" or "intellectual intuition." We have remarked earlier that Spinoza had spoken of recognition of the one substance as an intellectual intuition. Like our sensuous intuition of empirical objects, the intellectual intuition is immediate, direct, not inferential. Kant, for whom all our knowledge is indeed dependent on sensuous intuitions, therefore, denied that there can be such an intellectual

<sup>44</sup> Hegel's first philosophical essay, published before the *Journal* began to appear, was entitled *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, arguing that the difference was fundamental and altogether to Schelling's advantage. Another, comprising an entire issue of the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* (vol. 2, no. 1), called *Glauben und Wissen*, contained a sharp critique of Kant and Fichte. Whether, as it is sometimes claimed, Schelling had not been aware of how completely he had broken with Fichte until Hegel pointed it out to him, he soon weighed in with his own version of the difference in a philosophical dialogue entitled *Bruno*, to which reference will be made in the following. Both the *Differenzschrift* and the complete text of the six issues of the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* (1802–3), including Schelling's contributions, are included in vol. 4 of the latest edition of Hegel's *Gesammelte Werke*, entitled *Jenaer kritische Schriften*, eds. Hartmut Buchner and Otto Pöggeler (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968) [hereafter Hegel, GW].

intuition, except perhaps by God.<sup>45</sup> But Fichte revived the notion, declaring that the absolute ego is alike the subject and object of this intuition, apart from any empirical consciousness; it has an immediate intuition of its own activity, grasping itself in its freedom in every act of knowledge. Schelling and Hegel applauded Fichte for this revival but complained that for him the union of subject and object in the intuition is subjectivistic, occurring in the self-conscious subject alone. Rather, “in order to grasp the transcendental intuition purely,” we must recognize it to be “neither self-consciousness opposed to material nor material opposed to self-consciousness, but absolute identity, neither subjective nor objective.”<sup>46</sup>

Transcendental intuition is the immediate grasp of the juncture at which apparent opposites connect or intersect. Our duo employ the odd term *Indifferenzpunkt* – point of nondifference – for this intuited juncture. It is the point at which either of the two disjuncts passes over into the other. If we begin by considering the natural world, we intuit a point at which it passes over into the ideality of thought, and vice versa. The two are not *simply* identical, but they are not totally different either; nor is one reducible to the other.

In philosophical knowledge the intuited is an activity of intelligence and of nature, of consciousness and the non-conscious at the same time; it belongs to both worlds, the ideal and the real: to the ideal, since it is posited in intelligence and thereby in freedom, to the real since it has its position in the objective totality, deduced as a link in the chain of necessity. . . . In transcendental intuition all opposition is overcome [*aufgehoben*], the entire difference between the construction of the universe through and for intelligence, and as an objectively intuited, independently appearing organization, is eliminated. Producing the consciousness of this identity is speculation, and because ideality and reality is one in it, it is intuition.<sup>47</sup>

The use of the term “speculation” is one of Hegel’s contributions to the Philosophy of Identity; so is the description of the absolute, or *Indifferenzpunkt*, as “the identity of identity and opposition” – though the two are also provisionally opposed.

Insofar as they are opposed they are to be sure internally enclosed in themselves, and totalities; but they are at the same time only relative totalities, and as such they strive toward the *Indifferenzpunkt*.<sup>48</sup>

The *Indifferenzpunkt* is also the “turning point” where each constitutive science becomes speculative – mirrored in its apparent opposite. Therefore, Schelling’s

<sup>45</sup> Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 310; but see *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (included in Kant, Ak), sec. 77.

<sup>46</sup> *Differenzschrift*, Hegel, GW 4:77. See 35–7 for Hegel’s exposition of the Fichtean transcendental intuition. Hegel first presents his own understanding of it in 27–8, and Schelling refers to it repeatedly in *Bruno*.

<sup>47</sup> *Differenzschrift*, Hegel, GW 4:28.

<sup>48</sup> *Differenzschrift*, Hegel, GW 4:73.

voluminous writings on the philosophy of nature are integral to the Philosophy of Identity, and Kant and Fichte are harshly taken to task for their devaluation of the natural world. On the other hand, Hegel praises Schleiermacher's *Speeches* for expressing the sacredness of the natural universe and for identifying religious feeling as union with it (though the *Speeches* are also criticized for their alleged subjectivism).<sup>49</sup>

Integral to the Philosophy of Identity, indeed, is the religious insight that the infinite God and the finite, natural world are in essential unity: not a simple identity, but a coincidence of opposites, an *Indifferenz*, each necessary for the existence of the other. Evil is inherent in finitude as such; it is not, as for Kant and Fichte, an accidental feature of the world to be gradually overcome through moral effort. But according to our duo finitude is also forever transfigured and redeemed in God's "eternal incarnation," not occurring in a human individual at a moment in time but perduring everywhere and always in nature and in the human mind. Hegel employs the Johannine logos doctrine to articulate this eternal incarnation, the divine word immanent in creation and enlightening every human being; like Kant he omits the claim that the word became flesh in Christ. This divine presence in the finite world, so contrary to our experience of it, is not made known to us by faith but by reason, that is, by transcendental intuition. Indeed, our awareness of it completes the otherwise purely objective transfiguration of the world "in the intuition of the Absolute becoming itself objective in completed totality – in the intuition of the eternal incarnation of God, the witness of the Word from the beginning."<sup>50</sup>

This intuition, which remained at the heart of transcendentalist religion, is the point of juncture between religion and speculative philosophy. Speculation – and also art! – are said to be "in their essence worship, both are a vital intuition of absolute life and thus a being at one with it."<sup>51</sup> In an essay in the *Kritisches Journal*, "Über das Verhältniß der Naturphilosophie zur Philosophie überhaupt," probably by Schelling, it is said that "a philosophy that is not *in its principle* already religion, we also do not recognize as [genuine] philosophy."<sup>52</sup> The essay goes on to call for the reconciliation of Christianity with Greek paganism. The Christian vision, particularly among its more mystical exponents, is said to register

<sup>49</sup> *Differenzschrift*, Hegel, GW 4:8; cf. *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel, GW 4:316–17.

<sup>50</sup> *Differenzschrift*, Hegel, GW 4:75; cf. *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel, GW 4:407.

<sup>51</sup> *Differenzschrift*, Hegel, GW 4:75–6. Even in his later work, after he had abandoned transcendental intuition, Hegel continued to speak of philosophy as a kind of worship. He also treated art, religion, and philosophy as the three modes of absolute spirit, though in an ascending order of adequacy rather than in the equilibrium in which he places them here.

<sup>52</sup> *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* (vol. 1, no. 3), Hegel, GW 4:273. After Hegel's death the editors of the original edition of his *Werke* claimed that he was the author of this essay, a claim bitterly disputed by Schelling's disciples and by Schelling himself. It is certainly more in Schelling's style.

the overcoming of a presupposed breach between God and the world, and the alienation of the human from the divine, “not through an elevation of finitude to infinitude, but through the infinite becoming finite, through God’s becoming-human.” The mythological imagination of Greek paganism also registers a unification of finite and infinite, but its “direction” is the opposite of the Christian’s. It presupposes “the immediate divinity of the natural” and registers the lifting of finitude into the infinite. The true philosophy, which already intuits the *Indifferenz* of these two directions, anticipates the consummation of both in the “absolute gospel” of a “new religion.”<sup>53</sup> Schelling’s dialogue, *Bruno*, reaches similar conclusions. Its subtitle, *On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things*, is significant, for it undertakes to exhibit the *Indifferenz* of the two principles. In his peroration, Bruno, speaking for Schelling, waxes prophetic: Once we intuit the way both finite and infinite eternally “spring forth” from the absolute identity,

we shall grasp how that simple ray of light that shines forth from the absolute and which is the absolute itself appears divided into difference and indifference, into the finite and the infinite. Then . . . we will follow this path upward until we see the point where absolute identity appears divided into two relative identities; in the one, we will recognize the point of origin for the real or natural world, in the other, that of the ideal or divine world. Within the first world, we shall celebrate the eternal incarnation of God; in the second, the inevitable divinization of mankind.<sup>54</sup>

Here transcendentalism finds its most exuberant expression, in a sense of self that is, and knows itself to be, divine. For the mind turned toward the gods achieves “participation in their sublime mode of being through contemplation.” It is the ultimate speculation: mirroring the divine, it itself becomes divine.

The collaboration between the two young philosophers ended in 1803, when Schelling left Jena. It could not have lasted much longer in any case, as their thinking began moving along quite different paths. For each, the transcendentalist Philosophy of Identity faded into a superseded moment in his philosophical development. Each repudiated its more extravagant claims and disowned it as a philosophical basis of his thinking, though traces of it continue to turn up in the work of both. But its antireductionism, its appeal to intuition, and its speculative self-understanding continued to be attractive to many, some of whom carried its influence to English-speaking lands.

<sup>53</sup> Hegel, GW 4:272–4.

<sup>54</sup> *Bruno*, in *Schellings Werke* (Stuttgart, 1856–), 3:328–9. This work is translated with an excellent introduction by Michael G. Vater (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1984). The other three characters in the dialogue are Anselm, a Platonist; Alexander, a naturalist; and Lucian, who speaks for Fichte. The conclusion, which cannot have amused Fichte, has Lucian, like the others, accepting Bruno’s critique and embracing *Identitätsphilosophie*!

Coleridge was a tireless carrier of the sacred flame (or of the contagion, as many of his countrymen saw it). He adopted and freely adapted a good deal of post-Kantian philosophy in his own thinking. There were, to be sure, many strings on his resonant fiddle, but, for instance, the distinction between reason and understanding, central to his religious thought and paralleling the distinction between imagination and fancy in his poetics, bears strong resemblance to the way we have found the distinction made in the Philosophy of Identity. In an essay written for his journal, *The Friend* (1809), he speaks of the understanding as derivative, “the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phenomena of perception” or other given data. But reason is “the organ of the Super-sensuous”; as the eye directly perceives visible phenomena, so reason is the immediate registering of “spiritual objects.” It is in fact identical with them. “Thus, God, the Soul, eternal Truth, &c. are the objects of Reason; but they are themselves *reason*.... Whatever is conscious *Self*-knowledge is Reason.”<sup>55</sup> Though the language is none too clear, reason seems to be a version of transcendental intuition.

The lengthy and influential chapter 12 of *Biographia Literaria* is a spirited exposition of the one “PURE philosophy, ... properly entitled *transcendental*.”<sup>56</sup> The tent of transcendental philosophy is large, sheltering Plotinus, Kant, Jacobi, Fichte, and Schelling, all of whom are quoted with approval but not always with quotation marks. A large portion of the chapter consists of direct translations, without attribution, of substantial passages from Schelling’s early essays and the *System* of 1800 in particular. But the deployment of these borrowed texts and their arrangement and emphasis are Coleridge’s own, and he often interpolates original comments. The basis of this transcendental philosophy is the mind’s own intuition, sometimes called “the sacred power of self-intuition” or the “inner sense,” or, with Wordsworth, “the vision and the faculty divine.”<sup>57</sup> In this light Coleridge offers a transcendental interpretation of the Delphic injunction, know thyself. Such self-knowledge is complete only in the achievement of intuitive certainty that the self emanates from God and is divine. Drawing particularly on the early Schelling, Coleridge argues that theoretical and practical philosophy, and also nature and spirit, meet in their “equatorial point,” which “would be the principle of a total and undivided philosophy.”

<sup>55</sup> *The Friend*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 4, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 1:155–6. Coleridge adopts some of his terminology from Jacobi. *The Friend* was published in book form in 1818.

<sup>56</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 236–7. Chapter 12 crowns the “philosophical” chaps., 5–9, 11–13, of the *Biographia*, which include critiques of other schools.

<sup>57</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 241, 250. The editors of the Princeton edition, Engell and Bate, supply in footnotes the unattributed texts in the original German. In the Editors’ Introduction, cxvi–cxxvii, they discuss the charges of plagiarism that were voiced when it was first discovered how much of the text was unacknowledged translation.

In other words, philosophy would pass into religion, and religion become inclusive

of philosophy. We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD.<sup>58</sup>

For Coleridge himself, transcendental philosophy was an entry into Christian piety in particular, often finding expression in biblical or liturgical language.

The New England transcendentalists, a generation younger than Coleridge, did not always follow him in that respect, but many of them were steeped in his writings. Emerson was especially impressed by chapter 12 of the *Biographia Literaria*, which he reread in October 1876 as he was preparing to write his first major work, *Nature*.<sup>59</sup> Like Coleridge, he saw nature and spirit as two sides of the same coin. Thomas Carlyle, another major British transmitter of German thought and literature generally and an ardent transcendentalist, was also a powerful influence on Emerson's thinking and became a close friend.<sup>60</sup> Unlike Coleridge, Carlyle strongly rejected Christianity and was emphatic in keeping transcendental religion free of Christian taint, as did Emerson by the time they met. In 1836, after he had written *Nature*, Emerson began meeting with a group of associates in the precincts of Harvard in what they eventually called the Transcendental Club.<sup>61</sup> Though there was no formal membership, their meetings drew a dozen or so attendees for free discussion. After the club dissolved in 1840 some of the group began publishing a journal called *The Dial*. Their association was loose, as was their common understanding of transcendentalism, but in their work as authors and on the lecture circuit they were a significant force in American morality and religion. Their following was large but amorphous, not institutionalized, except as it influenced some liberal churches. Emerson, the most prominent among them, was active almost until his death in 1882.

<sup>58</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 282–3. The quotation is from Thesis IX of the ten theses with which the chapter concludes. This thesis, together with Thesis VI and its Scholium, brings out most clearly Coleridge's essentially religious understanding of transcendentalism.

<sup>59</sup> Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 219. Richardson remarks that Coleridge's chapter was "a central chapter for transcendentalism," though he mentions many other authors Emerson was reading, including Confucius and the Stoics, and especially Goethe.

<sup>60</sup> Richardson, *Emerson*, 145–9. Many of the essays collected in the five-volume edition of Carlyle's *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (Boston, 1839) are detailed and brilliantly written treatments of German thought and literature. Richardson particularly mentions "The State of German Literature," in vol. 1, as "a call-to-arms of transcendentalism." He also recounts Emerson's spirited visit with Carlyle; the two men, of the same generation, seem to have struck up an instant rapport.

<sup>61</sup> Richardson gives an account of the group and some of its more prominent members, which included some women (Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody, among others), *Emerson*, 247–51.



Little concerned with rigorous philosophy, he relied on his own intense intuitions and urged his hearers to do the same. His rhetoric is urgent, epigrammatic, oratorical, fresh. He disdains schools, governments, churches, traditions, as instruments of conformity that smother the original insights individuals might draw from their own lives. His fierce individualism, however, goes hand in hand with his certainty that every liberated soul is united with every other in a common divine life. The deeper the individual soul is planted in its own intuitive soil, freed from every form of *social* control, the more the sacred fire erupts in it that burns in all others. In his address on "The American Scholar," Emerson declares:

It is one central fire, which, flaming now out of the lips of Etna, lightens the capes of Sicily, and, now out of the throat of Vesuvius, illuminates the towers and vineyards of Naples. It is one light which beams out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which animates all men.<sup>62</sup>

Emerson elaborates this theme in his essay, "The Oversoul," with unexpected turns of thought impossible to summarize. But the transcendental fire is unmistakable in *this* Vesuvius!

In all conversation between two persons tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal, is God. . . . We do not yet possess ourselves, and we know at the same time that we are much more. . . . Often in my trivial conversation with my neighbors . . . Jove nods to Jove from behind each of us. Men descend to meet.

Seldom, indeed, has the essential human being been conceived so asocially or ahistorically.

Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God.<sup>63</sup>

Now *there's* reflexivity!

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Richardson, *Emerson*, 265.

<sup>63</sup> *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951, originally published New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1926), 196–7, 207.

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## THE DEFENSE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGION, 1790–1870

JAMES C. LIVINGSTON

The years 1790 to 1870 are an extraordinarily rich period in Western culture. They encompass the latter years of the Enlightenment and the various critical responses to it, including writers associated with the counter-Enlightenment, the early German romantic circle in Berlin, and the flourishing of German philosophical Idealism and French traditionalism, all offering distinctive critiques of Enlightenment reason, liberalism, and individualism. Later there emerged both left- and right-wing movements of neo-Hegelianism, followed after 1860 by a variety of schools of neo-Kantian philosophy that flourished in Europe. What is significant for our purposes here is that all of these philosophical currents provoked religious and theological responses. Some are now recognized as classic critiques of Western theistic religion (see Chapters 16, 17, 22). Others proved to be impressive speculative revisions of religion, often based on principles quite independent of the theological traditions (see Chapter 17).

A third response to these new challenges, and the one described in this chapter, generally was more conservative, maintaining an allegiance to a historic religious tradition. These writers often put modern critical philosophy itself (e.g., Hume, Kant, and Hegel) in the service of their more traditional apologetic. It is, therefore, important to distinguish these writers both from the radical critics of religion and the writers who were engaged in the speculative revision and defense of religion as a generic aspect of human life. By contrast, the third group of writers was concerned to defend a positive (i.e., historical) revelation and religious tradition. At the same time, they often sought to develop traditional *forms* of belief so as to show their continuing meaning and relevance, as well as their compatibility with developments in philosophy, science, and historical research.

In this respect, they also differ from other so-called modern defenders of a religious ‘orthodoxy’ who sought to revive or restore a religious tradition to what they judged to be its original pristine or classic position or expression, for example, to a form of patristic, medieval, or Reformation ‘orthodoxy’. In the nineteenth century this often entailed a defense of biblical inerrancy and infallibility, as in certain forms of Calvinism in North America, or the restoration of Thomistic

philosophy and theology during the reign of Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903), as officially adopted in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879). Our third group of writers opposed such wholesale efforts at ‘repristination’ or restoration of orthodoxy as both ahistorical and unnecessarily vulnerable to the attacks of the modern critics. Moreover, the question regarding what constituted ‘orthodoxy’ was itself, by the mid-nineteenth century, a highly contested theological issue.

The writers discussed here focused their attention on three interwoven themes: human language; the essential historical nature and development of religion, particularly as this is seen in the Christian tradition; and the important interrelationships in human understanding among revelation, reason, and faith. These themes also were prominent in the religious writings of two German thinkers – Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) – who are crucial links between the Enlightenment and some of the early nineteenth-century writers with whom we are here concerned. What Lessing and Herder represent is the engagement of late Enlightenment thought with history, and particularly with a historical way of understanding religion and its process of development. And this attention to history enriched their understanding of the nature and role of language and tradition, of rationality, of revelation, and of the character of truth itself.

#### THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE

The origin and nature of language were special preoccupations of scholars from the middle of the eighteenth century. Condillac, Maupertius, and others, saw language as a human invention, developed from biological or other human needs. Christian writers defended the divine origin of language, arguing, as some did, that the symbolic basis of thought is not a human invention; rather it is, like self-consciousness and reason, a gift of God.

J. G. Hamann (1730–88), Herder’s teacher and friend, did not accept what he saw as his pupil’s naturalism, for he thought that Herder’s talk of a human reflective capacity, that is, mind, itself required explanation. Following Hume’s discussion of causality, Hamann argued that the mind-body problem simply remains unsolved. What Herder and Hamann agreed on, however, is that language is neither invented nor revealed full-blown. Hamann believed the earliest humans communicated emotionally by vivid, sensuous images in song and gesture and that these images preceded the use of words. Moreover, humans are social beings, and their languages develop in particular social and historical environments. “The history of a people,” Hamann writes, “is in the language.”<sup>1</sup> He proceeds

<sup>1</sup> J. G. Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, eds. Walther Ziesemer and Arthur Henkel (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1955), 1:393.

to argue that the inescapable particularity of language resists Kant's effort, in his first *Critique*, to free philosophy from this linguistic and cultural constraint and to claim for it a uniformity and universalism. For Hamann, philosophy consists less in pure reasoning than in the clarification of linguistic misunderstandings, for example, the personification of arbitrary abstractions.<sup>2</sup> Hamann insists that neither human experience nor the actions of God can be reified and artificially contained within some professed universal and impartial rational categories. As one scholar has judged, Hamann's theory of language "was destined to celebrate its greatest triumphs in our own time,"<sup>3</sup> in Wittgenstein and British language analysis. We will see that Hamann's linguistic nominalism and historicism shape his thinking about reason, knowledge, faith, and truth.

Human language, and its distinctive relationship to society, thought, and tradition, also serves as the foundation of the conservative argument of French traditionalism, a movement that exerted considerable influence in France between 1796 and 1840. Traditionalism commonly refers to a group of French writers who, slightly before and during the period of Napoleon and the Bourbon Restoration (1814–30), rose to prominence as implacable critics of the French Revolution, its doctrines, and its values. More specifically, French traditionalism, as here considered, represents a smaller circle of Catholic writers who attacked the Enlightenment's espousal of individual reason as being corrosive of any certain knowledge, especially in the spheres of morality and religion; who look, rather, to tradition as the historical source of objective truth, as it is communicated to generations through a primal or original revelation, a truth that, in turn, is attested to by a "common consent" that can be called the "general reason" and that possesses a claim to inerrancy. The most influential of the early French traditionalists were Louis de Bonald (1754–1840); Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821); François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768–1848); and, during his early career, Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782–1854). A more moderate traditionalism emerged in the 1830s in the work of Louis Bautain (1796–1867), author of *Philosophie du Christianisme* (1835), and Augustin Bonnetty (1798–1879), founder of the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* (1830), a journal dedicated to a Catholic apologetic based on the philosophical examination of history rather than reason alone.

Bonald and Maistre were intellectual allies, and both argued that the most fundamental aspect of human life is society, not the individual, and that these social organisms possess a common 'soul' as manifest in their hallowed institutions: the family, the church, and, most basically, language. In their writings on language

<sup>2</sup> See J. G. Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, 5:272.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 328.

Maistre and Bonald differed in some matters, for instance, on innate ideas, but were in accord with regard to the relation of language to a primal tradition and its transmission, a key theme in the traditionalist apologetic. For our purposes, a brief commentary on Bonald's theory of language can canvass the salient points.<sup>4</sup>

Bonald begins by stating a social fact, namely, that discursive reason does not and cannot begin without first acquiring its crucial first principles from its historical context, that is, society, which, by means of language, makes possible the communication of thought. Language is *the* primal datum, and it is an objective fact observable in all human societies. It should be self-evident, therefore, that no single individual can convey thought without a specific language. There can be no thought if there are no words to express and communicate it, even to oneself. We think by language. Society cannot be the cause of language since without language there can be no society. The fundamental truth then is not Descartes's *cogito, ergo sum*, but rather the fact of language as foundational and, for Bonald, a gift of God. It is the distinctive emblem of the *imago Dei*, without which humans are not human. Language is "innate" in society, since it is brought forth, cultivated, and passed on through social tradition. Through language the revelation of those foundational first principles of morality and religion are first communicated, preserved, and transmitted from generation to generation.

The French philosopher the abbé Louis Bautain is best known for his writings on faith and reason, as we will see later. However, fundamental to his moderate traditionalism and his doctrine of a reasonable faith is a profound skepticism regarding the individual's ability to obtain knowledge of first principles. These, Bautain believed, are grounded in a revealed and resonant deposit of knowledge that is socially appropriated as a historical tradition. Just as a child comes to knowledge through time in and with the help of family and teachers, so the human race itself receives its divine education, and most conclusively through the revealed Mosaic and apostolic Word passed on by the church's tradition.

In England, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), the romantic poet and writer of several works on religion, also grounded his defense of historic Christianity on the crucial role of language. For Coleridge language and the human imagination are the crux of his attack on what he saw as the "dead" philosophy of sensationism, mechanism, and materialism dominant in his day. The ecclesial and cultural contexts in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century differed in important respects from those in France, yet in both contexts the challenge to religious belief and the theological tradition arose, in large part, through

<sup>4</sup> For Bonald's works on language see: *La Législation primitive considérée dans les derniers temps par les seules lumières de la raison*, 2 vols. (Paris: Le Clere, 1802); and *Recherches philosophiques sur les premiers objets des connaissances morales* (Paris: Le Clere, 1818).

the sustained critique by rationalist and empiricist thinkers. In Coleridge's time, the target was Benthamism, modeled as it was on the sciences.

There was, however, a second powerful factor in Britain: the movement of Evangelicalism, fast spreading in Methodism but also in the Church of England. This Evangelicalism often took on features of Benthamism: it was practical and literal-minded and frequently relied on the older rational 'evidences' of Christianity as represented by William Paley's (1743–1805) *Evidences of Christianity* (London, 1794). It was a religious sensibility that embraced not only rationalism but what Coleridge, borrowing from Lessing, called 'Bibliolatry', that is, a deifying of the Bible by claiming it to be infallible and inerrant, the work of what Coleridge called a Divine 'Ventriloquist'. Here Coleridge saw the issue of language, its use and abuse, as crucial to the future of the spiritual life itself. He wrote: "It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between Literal and Metaphorical. Faith either is to be buried in the dead letter, or its names and honours usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding."<sup>5</sup>

Coleridge's discovery of the aesthetic principle of the Imagination gave him the vocabulary and the ideas with which to express what, for him, was a truer appreciation of human experience. The Imagination was, for Coleridge, the result of his own creative reworking of two discoveries: one from the poet William Wordsworth, the second from the philosopher Immanuel Kant. In Wordsworth's poetry he found "the union of deep feeling with profound thought" – the perfect balance of true observation with the work of the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed. What Kant corroborated for Coleridge is that all our metaphysical truths are postulates of our practical reasoning, that is, of our experience as moral beings, not of our sensory knowledge. Coleridge contrasts the Imagination with what he calls "Fancy," which involves the reception of sensory data "ready-made from the law of association" – the passive aggregating and arranging of the phenomena of perception. For Coleridge, the importance of the human Imagination lies, then, in the fact that the mind is to be seen as active, not merely the passive receptacle of sensations.<sup>6</sup>

Coleridge later sought to relate his principles regarding the mind, language, and imagination to the ways in which Scripture currently was being both attacked and defended in Britain. In particular, he was distressed with how profoundly the language of science dominated and distorted the understanding of the Bible. His reflections on this crucial subject were meant for his *Aids to Reflection* (1825) but appeared only posthumously in the form of seven letters to a friend, entitled

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. R. J. White (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969–), 6:30.

<sup>6</sup> See Crites, Chapter 17, this volume, for a more detailed account of Coleridge on this subject.

*Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1840). Coleridge was among the first thinkers of the nineteenth century to commit himself thoroughly to the findings of historical-critical research on the Bible, recognizing its real humanity and errancy, and yet to hold that the spiritual truths and power of the Bible may “find you,” revealed *within* the Bible’s vast spiritual world in its stories of human hope, fear, affection, and faith. And this is no mere pious hope, for “in every generation and wherever the light of Revelation is shone, men of all ranks, conditions, and states of mind have found [the Bible] ... a spiritual world.” Yet these same “lights of experience” may lose all their efficacy because “a few parts may be discovered of less costly materials and of meaner workmanship?”<sup>7</sup> Would we deny, Coleridge asks, the supreme excellence of Shakespeare’s plays because within this marvelous canon we find *Titus Andronicus*? The same justice should be given the Bible that is given to other books of “grave authority” and “proved benefactors of mankind.” The problem is the modern doctrine of inerrancy, based on the specious conjunction of two very different statements. To say that “the Bible contains the religion revealed by God is not the same as saying Whatever is contained in the Bible is religion, and was revealed by God.”<sup>8</sup>

Coleridge concludes his *Confessions* by advancing a significant hermeneutical principle classically stated by St. Augustine: namely, that the Bible can *become* “the living Word of God” only when it is read in faith, that is, in a willing state of receptivity, and with the aid of an interpretive key or preunderstanding. For Coleridge this key includes all that constitutes the Christian tradition: its confessions and teachings, its spiritual life and worship, and the witness of the communion of saints. Knowledge of this rich heritage should *precede* the study of the Bible as preparatory. Unless one comes to the Bible with receptivity – similar to Herder’s interpretive ‘empathy’ (*Einfühlen*) – and instruction in the Christian religion, the reader will be prone to lay hold of an isolated text here or there and say “of what possible use is this?”<sup>9</sup>

The attention given to language and the imagination by European writers began to have its influence in North America as early as the 1840s. This is particularly evident in the writings of the American Congregationalist minister and theologian Horace Bushnell (1802–76). Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection* had a deep impress on Bushnell’s long essay “Preliminary Dissertation on the Nature of Language.” Bushnell sees nature as God’s unique “language” or communication to finite minds, but also as signaling the limits of human language. While literal words are the names assigned to physical objects, figurative language does not

<sup>7</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1840), ed. H. St. J. Hart, 3rd ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957), 68–70.

<sup>8</sup> Coleridge, *Confessions*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Coleridge, *Confessions*, Letter V, 65–7.



*literally* transfer a thought from one mind to another. Rather, it conveys “images” or “hints,” which means “there will be different measures of understanding and misunderstanding, according to the capacity or incapacity ... of the receiving party.”<sup>10</sup> And the endless disputes of the theologians over words – “faith,” “grace,” “atonement,” “incarnation” – is proof of the multiple meanings that they convey and the various “prepossessions” they reveal. Furthermore, these words are not only inexact; “they always affirm something that is false,”<sup>11</sup> since their kernel of truth is always clothed in earthen, changing forms. Specific representations may reveal some truth, but often they also neutralize others. This explains how the effort to describe the truth of, say, the Incarnation can best be expressed paradoxically.

Bushnell applies his doctrine of language to the Bible as well as to the creeds. The former should be studied “not as a magazine of propositions” and formulas but as a “grand poem of salvation” witnessed to by God’s heroes, poets, historians, prophets, and righteous saints, a company giving to the seeker “the most complete and manifold view possible of every truth,” living images, and parables that “*find us*.” While the phrases used by Puritan Calvinists may have served a role in their religious life, they now “wax old” in their dead literality and are in need of fresh restatement. Thus all doctrinal formulas need to be held in a certain “spirit of accommodation.” However, Bushnell was not proposing a doctrinal relativism or an indifference to doctrinal truth. Rather, he saw the historical formulations of religious doctrine as “complementary forces” that can “qualify, assist, and mitigate each other,” thus allowing for “the fullest, liveliest, and most many-sided apprehension of the Christian truth.” He called this the method of “Christian Comprehensiveness.” This inclusiveness reveals Bushnell’s liberality, but also his conservatism, his effort to retain the fullness and richness of the Christian tradition. Rationalists and those averse to creeds show a “want of catholicity, or comprehensiveness,” the error of seeing things only partially and thus insufficiently.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN HISTORICISM AND THE DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS TRADITION

The religious criticism directed at the French *philosophes* aimed not only at their rationalism but at what was perceived to be their wholesale rejection of the traditions of the past, especially those deeply rooted in the Christian heritage. As Edmund Burke observed, the French *lumières* had failed to show any respect

<sup>10</sup> Horace Bushnell, “Preliminary Dissertation on the Nature of Language as Related to Thought and Spirit,” *God in Christ* (1849), 3rd ed. (Hartford, Conn.: W. J. Hamersley, 1852), 46.

<sup>11</sup> Bushnell, “Preliminary Dissertation,” 47–9.

<sup>12</sup> Bushnell, “Preliminary Dissertation,” 55, 90, 70, 83–4.

for “the collected reason of the ages,”<sup>13</sup> as if the past simply comprised a mass of superstitions, prejudices, and malevolent errors. They were especially blind to the historic achievements and contributions of Christianity to Western civilization, assuming that these tried and time-honored ideas and institutions could be replaced with abstract and uncharted ones. The traditionalists believed that this distorted historical perspective was conjoined with a grievously false understanding of human nature. The *philosophes*’ notion of a natural human goodness was utopian, hence dangerous, for it portrayed human beings as ideally conceived, not as they are realistically depicted in the chronicles of history: prideful and corruptible, often cruel and unreasonable.<sup>14</sup> The French traditionalists were deeply Augustinian in their view of history and human nature.

What the Enlightenment had perceived as delusion and prejudice, its traditionalist religious critics saw as indispensable components of any stable society or nation. History had shown that these customs, traditions, and institutions emerged organically through the experience of untold generations, indeed, through centuries of trial and testing, and are rashly uprooted or ignored at the gravest peril to the well-being of society. Recognizing the enormous contribution of the Christian religion to Western civilization, the traditionalists took up the defense of its incomparable role in society.

A popular formulation of this defense is Viscount François-René de Chateaubriand’s (1768–1848) *Le génie du Christianisme* (1802). He judged the older Catholic rationalist apology to be exhausted, and in its place he offers an attractive account of the living, organic wholeness of Christianity and its unparalleled contribution to Western culture. His apology is historical and aesthetic. It appeals to the feelings and imagination of his readers, through six hundred pages of historical evidence, to prove that the Christian religion, of all the religions, is the most humane, the most favorable to liberty, the patron of the arts and sciences, the founder of hospitals, universities, and societies for the care of orphans and the poor.<sup>15</sup> For untold French citizens, including many intellectuals, the cumulative enumeration of the excellences and achievements of Catholic Christianity was impressive and compelling.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 95.

<sup>14</sup> For an account of the early development in France of a counter-Enlightenment and counter-revolution that, itself, was responsible for the “construction” of the Enlightenment as we have come to know it and that has become the easy target of its postmodernist critics, see Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> François-René de Chateaubriand, *Le génie du christianisme*, ed. Louis Louvet (Paris: Garnier, n.d.). *The Genius of Christianity*, trans. Charles I. White from the French ed. of 1854 (Paris: Librairie de Firman Didot frères; Baltimore, John Murphy, 1856; New York: H. Fertig, 1976). See, e.g., 48–9.

The traditionalist appeal to historical tradition was, however, only one result of the new historicism. With the ever-increasing application of the historical-critical method to the investigation of sacred literature and tradition, the appeal to history proved a dangerous threat as well as an apologetic windfall. Judaism and Christianity were founded on the ancient annals of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, and, thereby, both claimed to be historical religions based on real events of past history. Until the late eighteenth century this assumed “historical” advantage over the Greco-Roman and the Asian religions – based as they were on legend and myth – was largely unchallenged. However, with the increased use of historical-critical methods early in the nineteenth century, it often became painfully obvious that there could be no claims of historicity without the risks of historicity.

As it turned out, a variety of interrelated historical questions demanded attention. Lessing had previously posed one: How can the contingent events of history make claim to absolute or universal significance or truth? There was, of course, the more basic question, sharply directed at Christianity: How can the figure of Jesus embody anything more than a historically conditioned, hence relative, message or claim to truth? The German historical critics, such as J. G. Eichhorn (1752–1827), W. M. L. de Wette (1780–1849), and D. F. Strauss (1808–74), were now posing serious questions regarding the *historical* trustworthiness of the biblical *sources* themselves, for example, the five books of the Hebrew Pentateuch and the New Testament Gospels. These narratives included much material that the new historiography would no longer credit as genuinely historical.

The historians raised yet another related problem. Even if one were to grant that there is a consensus regarding the historical reliability of some of the earliest sources, how can one further claim that modern Christianity, for example, is the *same* religion as that of Jesus and the early apostles? And if it is not, on what grounds does one justify these later historical developments?

Conservative defenders of the religious tradition thus confronted a twofold task: first, a defense of the Bible in the teeth of the historical-critical assaults on its *historical* truth; second, a defense of Christianity’s historical continuity and unity despite its multifarious historical developments over time. This latter task was undertaken by theologians at the new Catholic theological faculty of the University of Tübingen between 1817 and 1840 and by John Henry Newman in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, published immediately after his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845.

The leaders of the Catholic Tübingen school were Johann Sebastian von Drey (1777–1853) and Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838). Both were influenced by German romantic Idealism and conversant with the work of Protestant theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and F. C. Baur. Unlike the French

traditionalists, whose religious interests were sociological and political, the Tübingen theologians were trained as historians and knowledgeable about Christian origins and the historical development of church doctrine. What Drey and Möhler attempted was the appropriation of the organic, social, and developmental vision that characterized German romanticism in the service of a revitalized Catholicism understood as a living divine organism revealing God's providential unfolding of his purposes through historical development itself. This vision consciously opposed the rationalism of both the Enlightenment and the revival of Scholasticism soon to be initiated by the Roman Jesuits. However, after 1870, Scholastic philosophy and theology were to triumph over the Tübingen school, placing it under Roman suspicion for a full century. Drey's more philosophical orientation can serve here as representative of the Tübingen school.

J. S. Drey urged that theology begin with the historical reality (positivity) of religion and of Christianity, rather than with a speculative philosophy that concerned itself with "natural religion" originating in an autonomous reason. Drey saw the history of the positive religions as the work of divine providence as mediated through real events in the world. Following Lessing, Drey held that "revelation ... is for the whole of mankind what education is for the individual."<sup>16</sup> These revelatory historical occasions mediate what is, for each community, intrinsically related to the needs of its unique culture and time. Yet Drey sees these successive revelatory dispensations as reaching their culmination in Jesus Christ and the ongoing life of the Catholic Church.

Christianity, he believed, best illuminates those feelings and ideas that lie deep in the various spiritual concretions in history. A knowledge of the content of this supreme revelation (its "necessity") is not, however, rationally self-evident. Just as in education, learning begins with trust in the teacher, so is faith required in revelatory history. It is *from* this faithful stance that a reasoned knowledge can be cultivated and result in an understanding of the revelation's truth. But it is only at this point that the revelatory "mysteries" pass over into ideas and can be seen as "truths of reason." Here one can observe Drey's dependence on both romantic German Idealism and the Augustinian doctrine of the relation between revelation and reason, the subject of our concluding theme.

It is important for Drey to point out further that revelation does not cease with the closing of the canon of Scripture (as most Protestants would claim). There persists the living, objective reality of the church as the continuation of the originating revelatory event, retaining its essential self-identity through the successive

<sup>16</sup> J. S. von Drey, *Tübinger Theologische Quartalschrift* 8 (1826): 206. See Wayne L. Fehr, *The Birth of the Catholic Tübingen School: The Dogmatics of Johann Sebastian Drey* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 58ff.

stages of history. Borrowing from Schelling's dialectic of opposites, Drey envisions the history of the church as a dynamic struggle to maintain its originating "self-identity" through opposition and struggle against foreign incompatibilities or heresies. It is through this struggle that the church realizes those doctrines or ideas that, while not present in the earliest tradition, do reinforce, illuminate, and protect its essential self-identity, the authentic "idea" of Christianity that abides.

In England, John Henry Newman (1801–90), theologian and historian of the early Christian Church, recognized, as did Herder, the French traditionalists, and Drey and Möhler, that any compelling defense of religion in the modern context must take up the profound questions raised by history as a process of development and change. The *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) represents Newman's personal wrestling with the question of how to reconcile the Roman church's claim to apostolicity with the obvious fact that much developed Catholic doctrine was not apostolic. It was plain that the later doctrines associated with the Virgin Mary, the sacraments, even the Trinity, were not known in the early church as they were later developed. The doctrines of the Council of Nicea (325 CE) were themselves the result of a long development. Why, then, should the process of development come to a halt? Newman found previous solutions, such as apostolicity, antiquity, and the doctrinal test laid down in the Vincentian canon – "what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all" – to be, from a historical perspective, spurious. The real doctrinal test is "life and growth," for, as he writes:

From the nature of the human mind, time is necessary for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas; and that the highest and most wonderful truths, though communicated once for all . . . could not be comprehended all at once by the recipients but . . . as being received and transmitted by minds not inspired and through media which are human, have required only the longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation.<sup>17</sup>

Newman's solution was bold. If his theory of development was rejected, the Nicene Creed could not be justified. However, if his theory is accepted and the definitions of the Council of Nicea are approved, why, then, reject the Council of Trent (1545–63), whose bishops, like those at Nicea, sought to shape new forms of doctrine the better to clarify and protect ancient teachings? What critics of Catholic development may reject as doctrinal "additions" may, in truth, be organic constituents essential to a complex body of interdependent doctrines. They may, for example, suggest, confirm, correlate, complete, or illustrate one another. Newman proceeds to show, often with rich illustrations and suggestive

<sup>17</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 3rd ed. 1878 (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 29–30.

criteria, how such developments have, in fact, been the case in the long history of Catholic doctrinal formation. Newman's apology was, on the whole, persuasive only to Catholics. Nonetheless, the *Essay* did serve as a clarion call to Catholic scholars, insisting that crucial issues pressing inexorably on the Catholic Church find their provocation and their urgency in the new historical way of thinking.

Writers such as Chateaubriand, Drey, and Newman perceived history as the positive handmaid of theology. Contrarily, German historical-critical work on the Bible and religious tradition often proved more the enemy than the friend of religion. It required a response, and the theological defense took three forms: the positivist, the existential, and the idealist. The positivist position is well represented by H. L. Mansel (1820–71), professor of moral and metaphysical philosophy at Oxford. Mansel's view of biblical revelation was influenced by Sir William Hamilton's (1788–1856) Kantian agnosticism regarding the mind's knowledge of the Infinite or Absolute.<sup>18</sup> This agnosticism also shaped Mansel's view of language and the relation between reason and revelation, our other themes.

In *The Limits of Religious Thought* (1858) Mansel defends a conservative view of the Bible on the agnostic principle that the Ultimate, or God, being unconditional, is incognizable and inconceivable. Mansel was not, however, willing to conclude that this limit on human thought is the limit of religious belief. The positive conception of God's attributes and actions as revealed in the Bible, while beyond human comprehension, does, nonetheless, serve a regulative function:

Hence it is that ideas and images which do not represent God as He is may nevertheless represent Him as it is our duty to regard Him. They are not in themselves true; but we must, nevertheless, believe and act as if they were true . . . a conception which is speculatively untrue may be regulatively true.<sup>19</sup>

The Bible's "Anthropomorphism" is God's language and symbolism by which he condescends to meet our human limits, how he wills that humans think of him, and by which he guides human conduct. Inconceivable to reason, the Bible's only ground is that it is revealed. Mansel's biblicism and his rejection of natural theology, that is, his refusal to allow reason to know God, or to judge the content and truth of biblical revelation, or have any rational or mystical "point of contact" with God, reflects affinities with his contemporary Søren Kierkegaard (see later discussion) and with the alleged "positivism of Revelation" associated with the influential twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth. However, Mansel's position

<sup>18</sup> Sir William Hamilton (ed.), "On the Philosophy of the Unconditioned," in *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform* (London: Longman, 1853; New York: Harper, 1861). This essay originally appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* 1 (1829).

<sup>19</sup> H. L. Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1867), xi–xii. The fifth edition includes valuable new material.

does not preclude the genuine use of analogy in his regulative use of revelatory language, contrary to critics such as J. S. Mill.<sup>20</sup> It can be argued that, while insisting on the divine “holy otherness,” Mansel’s use of analogy does avoid the Scylla of anthropomorphism and the Charybdis of a pure agnosticism: “It was not the connotation of the term ‘justice’ which differed in the case of God and in the case of man, but the *denotation*; the *particular things* which men supposed to be just.”<sup>21</sup> What is absent in Mansel’s defense of the Bible is, however, any engagement with contemporary historical-critical work on Scripture or its theological implications. Among other things, this ahistorical approach to the Bible allowed Mansel to accept certain orthodox doctrines as invulnerable to criticism.

By contrast with Mansel, J. G. Hamann was an existentialist and a radical historicist. For him, only the particular in history – and nature – is real. It is through the individual’s encounter with concrete historical facts and images – as they resonate in the depth of that person’s being – that divine truth is revealed. Truth, Hamann writes, cannot be created out of the air; it must be “dug out of the ground,” disclosed in earthly things by metaphors and parables. Hamann perceives God as a kind of poet who speaks to humanity through these sensuous images. Thus he is not loath to compare history with mythology, for in the latter – as in biblical history – the stories are to be read realistically, not as dead chronicles of a bygone past, but as living exemplars and verities that bear on the historical present. Nature is to be read similarly: “All the phenomena of nature are dreams, visions, riddles, which have their significance, their secret meaning. The book of nature and the book of history are nothing but ciphers, hidden signs.”<sup>22</sup> And in this they are more akin to mythology than the philosopher may surmise, each “a book that is sealed, a hidden witness ... which cannot be solved unless we plough with another heifer than our reason.”<sup>23</sup>

To say that history is like mythology is to claim that history has meaning beyond the mere concatenation of mundane events. It is, rather, to see history eschatologically, viewed, that is, from its end or divine *telos*, as having a unity, like a living person. Hamann writes: “Who can have right ideas of the present without knowing the future? The future determines the present, and the present

<sup>20</sup> For Mill’s critique of Mansel, see J. S. Mill, *An Examination of William Hamilton’s Philosophy* (London: Longman & Green, 1865), chap. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Edwin Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 334.

<sup>22</sup> J. G. Hamann, *Fragments* (1758), ed. Josef Nadler, in *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols. (Vienna: Herder, 1949–57), I: Fragment no. 8. J. G. Hamann, 1730–88: *A Study in Christian Existence*, ed. and trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins, 1960), 172. Smith’s J. G. Hamann includes a complete English translation of the *Fragments*.

<sup>23</sup> J. G. Hamann, *Socratic Memorabilia*, in *Sämtliche Werke* 2:125. *Hamann’s Socratic Memorabilia: A Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. James C. O’Flaherty (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 151.

determines the past, as the purpose determines the [human] constitution and the means to be used.”<sup>24</sup>

And to say that we must “plough with another heifer than reason” is to insist on the hermeneutical insight that there is no such thing as a presupposition-less interpretation. The book of history, so filled with signs and ciphers, requires some interpretive key that reveals history’s meaning, its unity, and its end. For Hamann that key is the Bible, revealing its all-inclusive providential drama from the Creation through the story of Adam to the coming of the second Adam, Christ, history’s *telos*. With this key, the types and parables of Scripture come alive, revealing humanity’s existential condition and its personal summons.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) was attracted to Hamann’s ideas in several respects, as his early journal entries attest. These included Hamann’s critique of reason, his appeal to concrete, lived experience, and its crucial relationship to his reflection on faith and history. Kierkegaard, however, explored the issue of faith and history more deeply and drew more radical conclusions in his defense of an authentic Christian existence. In the fifty years between Hamann’s death and Kierkegaard’s authorship the question of history became the crux of the debate about Christianity, first in the left-wing Hegelians, especially D. F. Strauss and Bruno Bauer (1809–82) in their radical New Testament studies. Kierkegaard was well informed of these threatening developments, and they deepened his suspicions of any efforts to defend Christianity on purely objective, historical grounds.<sup>25</sup>

In the *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), Kierkegaard undertakes, in the person of Johannes Climacus, a series of “thought-projects” on the questions whether human beings possess the ability to know the truth and whether the truth of Christianity can be grounded on a singular historical event. Here Kierkegaard’s debt to Lessing is acknowledged in both the *Fragments* and the *Postscript*. Of foremost importance is Lessing’s dictum that the “accidental truths of history can never become the proof of the necessary truths of reason.” On the title page of the *Fragments*, Climacus inquires: “Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?”<sup>26</sup> And, in the thought-project,

<sup>24</sup> J. G. Hamann, *A Clover-Leaf of Hellenistic Letters*, in *Sämtliche Werke* 2:175. J. G. Hamann, 187.

<sup>25</sup> On this Hegelian context and Kierkegaard’s awareness of the new radical historical critiques of Strauss and others, see Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 210 and passim. A recent critic rightly speaks of Kierkegaard’s work “as a kind of preemptive strike against the Higher Criticism.”

<sup>26</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 7:1.



Kierkegaard proposes that for Christianity it is precisely in a historical event that the individual's eternal happiness is achieved. This requires a crucial venture of faith, but such an act of faith remains a radical offense to reason. While philosophical rationalism assumes that the truth can be learned, since it is potentially present in each individual, Christianity teaches, on the contrary, that in a unique *moment* in history, a specific historical bearer and teacher of the truth is required. Furthermore, it insists that the historical *moment* and teacher are not only necessary to the bringing of the truth; the teacher also must give to the learner the condition necessary to understand and appropriate it.

Kierkegaard speaks of the Moment variously as the Absolute Paradox, the Miracle, the Absurd, to which the individual responds either in faith or with offense. The Absolute Paradox is, in fact, doubly absurd, for it claims not only that the Eternal (God) has taken on a human life, but also that the happiness of humanity has its point of departure in a historical event, the very contingent historicity of which can only be accorded probability.

Climacus proceeds to explore a related question about faith and history. Does the disciple contemporary with Jesus have an advantage over later disciples, that is, those at second hand? Christianity says no, for, as Climacus points out, "For one who has what one has from the god himself obviously has it at first hand, and one who does not have it from the god himself is not a follower."<sup>27</sup> The credibility of the contemporary witness does not serve as the ground of the later disciple's belief, since the historical fact here referred to is the Moment, the absolute or eternal fact. And every age is equally near it, for there is only one tense in relation to the Eternal, and that is *the present*: "If the fact of which we speak were a simple historical fact, the historian's scrupulous accuracy would be of great importance. This is not the case here, for faith cannot be distilled from even the finest details."<sup>28</sup>

The thought-project makes clear that for faith there can be no shortcut or immediacy, either for the original disciple or for the disciple at second hand, whereby the leap of faith can be removed. In relation to the Moment, the eternal in time, there can be no scholarly "approximation process." Such a process could never be completed, never be without a shadow of a doubt or lead to a decisive judgment or action: "Faith does not result from a straightforward scholarly deliberation, nor does it come directly; on the contrary, in this objectivity one loses that infinite, personal, impassioned interestedness, which is the condition of faith."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 100.

<sup>28</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 103–4.

<sup>29</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 12:29.

In the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard explores at length the theme that religious *truth is subjective* because it is a truth that requires a passionate personal appropriation of what is objectively and historically uncertain. Kierkegaard's notion of a "leap of faith" has been interpreted as irrational, as a voluntaristic "argument from need," or as similar to Pascal's 'Wager'. Others have argued, rather, that the Absolute Paradox leaves no place for a purely voluntaristic exercise of the human will, since faith is a pure gift of God.<sup>30</sup> Others reject these interpretations and insist that for Kierkegaard faith is neither "blind" and irrational nor a purely extrinsic gift of God. Returning to a more traditional Christian position – that divine grace and human decision are interdependent, not mutually exclusive – it is argued that for Kierkegaard faith has its reasons, which, when they reach a convergence, a "critical threshold," result in a decisive and qualitative change, experienced as both compelled and yet wholly free.<sup>31</sup> Others would insist that, for Kierkegaard, such a process is far too intellectual and does not take seriously what Kierkegaard insists on as "the breach of continuity" between faith and reason.

The responses of philosophical and theological Idealists to the new challenges of historical criticism were conspicuously different from both the position of an H. L. Mansel and the existentialist stance of Søren Kierkegaard, although one can discern some affinities between the existentialist position and those of some of the right-wing Hegelians in Germany and British idealists in the mid- and the late nineteenth century.

Christian theologians such as Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860) and Alois Emanuel Biedermann (1819–85), while deeply influenced by Hegel, nevertheless held that he had left uncertain the question whether the historical representation of Jesus (*Vorstellung*) was essential to, or merely historically contingent in its relation to, the Christian idea (*Begriff*) or principle. Both Baur and Biedermann saw D. F. Strauss as explicitly breaking the connection between Christian faith and the historical Jesus. Both insisted that the Christian idea or principle and the historical figure of Jesus are necessarily correlative, and, for Baur, this could only be determined by historical research, not by speculation or by orthodox dogmatic fiat. Baur, however, agreed with Hegel that the Christ of faith, while entering human consciousness *through* Jesus, is not *wholly realized* in him, for the idea of the God-manhood union cannot be realized only in a single historical individual. It is, however, only from an objective historical investigation of the earliest sources *and* the evolving Christian tradition that the process of the human self-consciousness of God-manhood in history can be shown and understood.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., C. Stephen Evans, "Does Kierkegaard Think Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 26 (December 1989): 173–84.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., M. Jamie Ferreira's *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

A. E. Biedermann was profoundly influenced by Hegel's writings on the principle or Idea of the Incarnation. Nevertheless, he thought Hegel's Idea too abstract, implying that it was either generated by human thought or abstracted from history, rather than affirmed as a distinctive historical reality in Jesus's own life and religious consciousness. However, though first entering history in the figure of Jesus, the "Christian principle" is not to be taken as defined by the *single* person Jesus, for inherently it is contained in the essence of God and man as their genuine relationship. What the Christian Church represents in mythological form as *the* God-man is, in fact, the representation of the intrinsic relation between God (Absolute Spirit) and humanity, immanently present in human spiritual life. Important to the right-wing Hegelian theologians was not only confidence regarding adequate knowledge of the historical figure of Jesus, but also the historical development of the Christian tradition, that is, the Christian Idea or principle of the God-manhood relation as it is actually disclosed in the historical process.

In the years following 1860, several British Idealists, instructed by Hegel and by F. C. Baur, used similar ideas of the union of Jesus's consciousness with God as revealing the eternally true God-man relationship in history, while not limiting this achievement to Jesus. They sought to defend a number of Christian doctrines by reconceiving them with the aid of a philosophical Idealism. Essential to these reconceptions was the effort to free Christianity from the unremitting challenges of historical criticism but to affirm, at the same time, that these "Christian ideas" are, to the eyes of faith, disclosed in the inexhaustible process of the divine self-manifestation in and through human history.

#### LIVING EXPERIENCE, REASON, AND FAITH: THE CRITIQUE OF THE PURISM OF REASON

Many of the writers associated with the counter-Enlightenment and romanticism were not opposed to reason. What they opposed was a discursive and dissecting reason that often shut its eyes to lived experience while building "castles in the air." When the counter-Enlightenment writers spoke of reason, it was often in conjunction with their reflections on language, society, and tradition, that is, a reason embodied in history. As Hamann was to insist: "Reason is language, *logos* ... the bone I gnaw at, and shall gnaw myself to death over."<sup>32</sup>

Hamann's mature thought on reason is best set out in an essay in response to the appearance of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Riga, 1781), which Hamann saw as a compendium of Enlightenment rationalism. Hamann's essay was completed

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Herder, August 6, 1784. Cited in J. G. Hamann, 246.

in 1784 and distributed to friends but was not published until 1800. Entitled a *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*, the essay had as its leitmotif what Hamann considered Kant's pretentious reason disembodied from the concrete phenomena of language, history, and cultural institutions, that is, beyond space and time. He charged Kant with a "gnostic hatred of matter," for Kant's purified abstractions pointed up his failure to realize that language precedes thought and is reason's "organ and criterion," whose credentials are tradition and usage.

To counter Kant's reason, Hamann appeals to Socrates and David Hume. Socrates embodies a noble "learned ignorance" that, while exposing all clever sophistries and the falsity of received opinions, also reveals a profound humility and sensibility regarding the limits of the human mind.<sup>33</sup> And Hume courageously demonstrates how reason itself has a way of dissolving common sense ideas about both the self and the world, to the degree that he requires belief when he "eats an egg, or drinks a glass of water." Hamann confessed to Herder that Hume was his man "because he honours the principle of belief and has taken it up into his system."<sup>34</sup>

One aspect of *Glaube*, faith, or belief is Socrates' "learned ignorance." More affirmatively, belief is present in all of our sensory experience of the world, for these immediate impressions are the source of real knowledge and not antithetical to reason, although they are not demonstrable. Hamann insists that "*sensibility* and *understanding* spring as two stems of human knowledge from *One* common root, so that through the former objects are *given* and through the latter are *thought*." And there is no justification for a violent or arbitrary "divorce of what nature has joined together!"<sup>35</sup>

Hamann's discussion of reason and faith, in this context of Kant's first *Critique*, is highly compressed and certainly begs further elucidation. However, it is clear that Hamann's position is not that of an irrationalist; nor is it a radical fideism if, by these terms, one implies a blind "leap of faith," for, as one scholar suggests, what Hamann proposes is "a return *to* experience, not a leap beyond it." And here, it would appear, his point of view differs from that of Johannes Climacus in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*.<sup>36</sup>

One of Hamann's friends and early readers of the *Metacritique* was the German philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819). The two often are paired as

<sup>33</sup> See Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia*, especially 167. The text translated by O'Flaherty is that of Josef Nadler, *Sämtliche Werke* 2:57–82.

<sup>34</sup> Letter to Herder, May 10, 1781. Cited in J. G. Hamann, 244.

<sup>35</sup> J. G. Hamann, *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*, trans. Kenneth Haynes, in *What Is Enlightenment?* ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 157. The German critical edition of the *Metacritique* is found in J. G. Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke* 3:281–9.

<sup>36</sup> Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 290 ff.

early leaders of the protest against Enlightenment rationalism and key proponents of the new philosophy of faith in the period of the *Sturm und Drang*. While this is true, Jacobi's own doctrine of faith and reason was criticized by Hamann – whether correctly or not – as constituting an irrational fideism. Hamann believed that the objects of faith, while beyond proof or disproof, were nonetheless objects of real knowledge. Jacobi's position represented, for Hamann and others, a genuine separation and a destined conflict between demonstrative reason and faith.

Jacobi's writings remain crucial to the history of the decline of confidence in the *Aufklärung's* idea of a universal, autonomous reason, for it was Jacobi who undertook often-telling critiques of the philosophies of Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. He saw them all as rationalists whose philosophies inevitably lead to determinism and atheism, what Jacobi called "nihilism." Jacobi's attack on Spinoza was launched through his debate with the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86) over what Jacobi saw as Lessing's adoption of Spinoza's purported pantheism.<sup>37</sup> While Mendelssohn insisted that religion requires rational justification and not mere faith, Jacobi viewed the closed systems of demonstrative reason as, finally, destructive of both religion and morality. He was certain, for example, that Spinoza's thorough application of the principle of sufficient reason resulted in a naturalistic and mechanistic monism that denies both human freedom and an unconditioned and self-existent God and Creator of all other beings.

Later, Jacobi attacked the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte's (1762–1814) transcendental Idealism as exemplifying pure philosophy in the strictest sense.<sup>38</sup> He speaks of Kant – "the Baptist of Königsburg" – as merely the forerunner of Fichte, "the true Messiah of speculative reason," and describes what he sees as the inevitable movement of Fichte's epistemological "nihilism": "We comprehend a thing only insofar as we can construct it, make it originate, come into existence before us in thought ... completely our own creation subjectively ... [but] now a mere representation of our productive imagination."<sup>39</sup> Everything outside the absolute ego is transformed into a pure imaginative construct, into Nothing (nihilism).

<sup>37</sup> Called the Pantheism controversy, this debate engaged not only Jacobi and Mendelssohn but also Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. It transcended the question of Lessing's pantheism, for Jacobi extended his critique of Spinoza to all rational metaphysics as the enemy of religious faith. The controversy challenged the foundations of the *Aufklärung*. For a fine discussion of this controversy and its historical importance see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987, 1993), chaps. 2–4.

<sup>38</sup> F. H. Jacobi, "Jacobi an Fichte," 1799, in *Werke*, eds. Friedrich Roth and Friedrich Köppen, 6 vols. (1812–25), vol. 3 (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1816; reprint, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976, 1980). See "Open Letter to Fichte," trans. Diana I. Behler, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1987), 23:119–41.

<sup>39</sup> "Open Letter to Fichte," 127.

Against this implied idealist negation, Jacobi offers his own doctrine of belief. Charged with teaching a “blind faith,” he, with Hamann, appeals to Hume’s idea of “natural belief.”<sup>40</sup> Jacobi argues that there are not two kinds of knowledge of existence: perception (*Empfindung*) and reason (*Vernunft*), the faculty of grasping relationships with absolute certainty. He insists, rather, that the latter can never be proven with certainty, for all knowledge results only from belief, since things external to our minds must be given to us before we can perceive their relationships. Therefore, *Vernunft* is itself a form of cognition that is not demonstrable, as Hume had recognized. Late in his life, Jacobi published a second edition of his *Hume on Belief* with a long introduction that reveals an important development in the use of terms critical to his philosophy of belief.<sup>41</sup> As the early dialogue on Hume countered criticisms of a blind leap of faith, the new introduction attempts to clarify his use of the terms belief and reason, but, in fact, it represents a striking change since it widens his understanding of reason’s role. He now distinguishes between reason (*Vernunft*) and intellect or understanding (*Verstand*). While humans and animals share intelligence, humans alone possess reason. With Coleridge, Jacobi argues that reason is the unique organ of supersensible knowledge, just as sensory perception is the organ of knowing objects in the world. This intuitive or revelatory faculty of reason gives the intellect a confident knowledge of God, freedom, immortality.<sup>42</sup> The operation of belief thus covers two modes of knowing: the sensible and the supersensible. As there is a sensible intuition through sense (*Sinnes-Empfindung*), so also is there a rational intuition through reason (what Jacobi calls *Geistes-Gefühl*), as sources of real knowledge. In neither case, however, can they claim the status of demonstrative proof.

Critics have focused on Jacobi’s bold claim regarding the intuition of reason (*Vernunft*) and on his inviting confusions in the conflating of terms such as ‘belief’, ‘reason’, and ‘feeling’. Nevertheless, Jacobi’s work is important, not only for his critiques of rational metaphysics, as well as of Kant’s critique of pure reason, but also for his efforts to find a way between rationalistic theology and the newer appeals to an irrational fideism. He is also seen as being very modern in his claims that a basic faith is the ground of all our foundational convictions.<sup>43</sup>

The religious critique of the Enlightenment in France was largely undertaken by writers associated with traditionalism, as noted earlier. It affirmed *tradition*

<sup>40</sup> F. H. Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus: Ein Gespräch* (Breslau: Gottlieb Löwe, 1787).

<sup>41</sup> Jacobi, *Hume über den Glauben*, in *Werke*, 2:3–123.

<sup>42</sup> Jacobi, *Werke* 2:58–60.

<sup>43</sup> For an excellent brief examination of Jacobi’s concept of faith and its wider contemporary significance, see Brian Gerrish, *Continuing the Reformation: Essays on Modern Religious Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), chap. 4, “Faith and Existence in the Philosophy of F. H. Jacobi.”

as the objective criterion and guide to truth, attested to by what it called the ‘*consensus omnium*’, or ‘general reason’. However, this form of apologetic reached its zenith by 1830. At the same time in Strasbourg there emerged a school of moderate traditionalism, under the leadership of the abbé Louis Bautain. While dependent on features of the older traditionalism, it was distinct in its acceptance of the post-Kantian critique of metaphysics, specifically as directed at the rationalism of Scholastic theology now enjoying a revival in France. Bautain’s moderate traditionalism focused on the issue of reason and faith, and it took the form of a new apology for Catholic Christianity.<sup>44</sup>

Bautain’s philosophy of faith reflects the influence of both French and German currents. Two themes of French traditionalism stand out: the need for a primal divine revelation and the essential role of society through which the tradition is transmitted historically. Kant’s critical philosophy also played a crucial, though preliminary, role for Bautain in that it convinced him of the impotence of pure reason and closed off one (rational metaphysics) path to belief in God. Bautain concurred, however, with Jacobi that discursive reason is but one power of the mind, since the mind also possesses an intuitive cognitive power (‘faith’), which, like Coleridge’s Reason, is capable of apprehending supersensible realities. While God’s existence cannot be demonstrated, it can be revealed to a receptive mind, implying the active cooperation of the self’s intelligence, will, and affections.

Bautain’s doctrine of faith was condemned by church authorities as “Fideism,” but it was far from a blind, irrational faith. In contrasting reason with faith, Bautain meant by the latter three interrelated phenomena: 1) the willingness to begin with assumptions and then attempt to reason from them and 2) the act of receptivity by which one freely exposes oneself attentively to an idea or person, and by which attention new knowledge is born; it is by this process that faith becomes self-evident knowledge, a certitude.<sup>45</sup> Further, 3) faith is a feeling or indistinct apprehension of something that one believes one ought to accept as true. Bautain insists that faith, while still “veiled,” or not fully conscious and articulate, is nonetheless knowledge, and not merely the precondition of knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

For Bautain, faith is prior to reason in at least three ways: logically, because reason must take its foundational principles on faith; psychologically, because rational reflection is preceded by a receptivity and a feeling or *presentiment* without which systematic reflection could not be launched; and theologically and

<sup>44</sup> Louis Bautain, *Philosophie du Christianisme: Correspondance religieuse de L. Bautain, publiée par l’Abbe H. de Bonnechose*, 2 vols. (Paris: Derivaux; Strasbourg: Fevrier, 1835; reprint, Frankfurt: Minerva, 1967).

<sup>45</sup> Bautain, *Philosophie du Christianisme*, 1:296–7.

<sup>46</sup> Louis Bautain, *Psychologie expérimentale* (Strasbourg: Derivaux; Paris: Lagny, 1839), 2:376–7.

apologetically, because the unbeliever seldom is led to religious belief by discursive reason, but through the workings of faith as described by Bautain.<sup>47</sup>

It often is pointed out that Bautain's philosophy of faith stands in the tradition of St. Augustine's *Credo ut intelligam*, the mind's movement from faith to understanding through the activity of divine illumination. Bautain's alleged "voluntarism" also has been compared with the ideas of William James and pragmatism. However, while Bautain does sometimes speak of the will's pronouncing judgments like a judge, the will does not decide blindly, since it is informed by intelligence. For Bautain, there is no faith without the will, but the will itself is not the master of faith. For both Coleridge and Bautain, revelation and the church's tradition are the hermeneutical preconditions of a *Christian* apprehension of spiritual truth, the concurrence of both poles necessary for a true understanding.

In 1870, at the First Vatican Council, the apostolic constitution, *Dei Filius*, declared that the existence of God and a number of divine attributes can be known with certainty by natural reason. While Bautain's teachings had, by then, been condemned and were out of favor, his historical legacy is significant. He is a critical source of the spiritualist philosophy of action in France that runs from Maine de Biran (1766–1824) to Bautain, to Alphonse Gratry (1805–72), Léon Olle-Laprune (1839–98), Maurice Blondel (1861–1949), and Lucien Laberthonnière (1860–1932), editor of the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, an important organ of the movement.

The empiricist tradition from Locke to Hume was the intellectual context in which the discussions of reason and faith were carried out in Britain throughout the nineteenth century. For Coleridge, as we have seen, Jeremy Bentham's (1748–1832) scientific empiricism and his moral "hedonic calculus" represented the dead hand of a "mechanical philosophy." Between 1840 and the 1870s, John Stuart Mill's substantial restatement of scientific empiricism and utilitarianism established him as the most influential British philosopher of the century. His *System of Logic* (London, 1843, 2 vols.) was received by the new generation of scientific empiricists as a kind of "sacred book," the primer for an empiricist account of knowledge that opposed all "intuitionism" and all appeals to authority, tradition, and revelation.

It was during this period that John Henry Newman came to epitomize this despised "intuitionism." Ironically, Newman was imbued with the British empiricist way of thinking. He was suspicious of our knowledge of the external world and had a deep distrust of the efforts of natural theology to produce 'evidences' of

<sup>47</sup> See Walter Marshall Horton, *The Philosophy of the Abbé Bautain* (New York: New York University Press, 1926), 173ff. This work remains one of the fullest and finest studies of Bautain's thought, his historical context, and his legacy. I am much indebted to this valuable study.



God's existence and wisdom. Newman's writings are replete with statements in which he confesses that he sees no reflection of the Creator when he looks out upon the world of nature.<sup>48</sup>

Newman was an acute observer of nature and history, but his observations of the interior life are even more striking. This is reflected in his lifelong preoccupation with religious epistemology – from his first sermon on religious belief, preached before the University of Oxford in 1826, to his mature theory synthesized in the *Grammar of Assent* (1870).

The most important of Newman's crucial *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford* between 1826 and 1843 are the last six, preached between 1839 and 1843. Here one can observe the development of themes that anticipate the *Grammar of Assent*. The context of these sermons is the legacy of eighteenth-century British rationalism and empiricism, especially as it relates to the popularity of the "Evidences Christianity," arguments that Newman and his tractarian associates considered unpersuasive. What Newman means by reason is characterized by three features: it is explicit, analytical, logical; it is evidential and demonstrative; and it is based on secular first principles. It is similar to what Coleridge had called the Understanding, or the "faculty of judging according to sense," and its claim to be the sole arbiter of truth. Newman addressed this context in a sermon entitled "The Usurpations of Reason" (1831). He points out that while reason is but one important faculty of human life, it has, under the domination of secular first principles, "usurped" other faculties – the moral sense, feeling, and the imagination – that are better suited to make judgments in areas such as morals and religion. Newman points out, for example, "that there is no necessary connection between the intellectual and the moral principles of our nature,"<sup>49</sup> as one readily discovers in concrete cases. A further instance of this "usurpation" of reason can be observed when it leads "men to apply such Scripture communications as are intended for religious purposes to the determination of physical questions."<sup>50</sup>

Newman then expands on a feature of faith that he later considered his most "original" insight in the *Oxford University Sermons*: his argument that "antecedent probabilities" are "the great instrument of conviction in religious (nay in all)

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 216. This is the critical edition.

<sup>49</sup> John Henry Newman, "The Usurpation of Reason," in *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford* (London: Longmans, Green, 1872), 55. The 1872 edition of the *Sermons* is cited in this chapter because it includes a valuable preface and footnotes in which Newman attempts to clarify his use of the terms "reason" and "faith." It also demonstrates the development of his thinking on several points.

<sup>50</sup> Newman, "Usurpation," 59.

matters.”<sup>51</sup> Faith appears to oppose itself to reason since it is satisfied with less than reason requires. Why? Because, Newman observes, faith “is mainly swayed by antecedent considerations” – by “previous notices, prepossessions, and (in a good sense of the word) prejudices.” In this regard, “faith is a principle of action” that by its very nature must be guided less by exacting evidence and proof than “by previously-entertained principles.” But this is the case in all human action, not in the religious sphere alone. Newman acknowledges, however, that faith’s satisfaction with “cumulative probabilities” – rather than demonstrative evidence – is the reason why faith is considered irrational by the secular world.<sup>52</sup>

These previous observations about “antecedent considerations” relate to Newman’s insistence that faith is a moral principle. A good and a bad man will think different things probable. A religious person may judge certain things “as desirable and attainable” that an irreligious man “will consider a mere fancy.”<sup>53</sup> These different “prepossessions” can also be operative in an individual’s assessments of the physical world. A person who has experienced God independently of his examination of nature would more likely see creative design and Providence in the world. To another mind, atheism may be consistent with observations of the phenomena of this same world.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, if a person is disinclined to believe an alleged fact, “he will explain away very strong evidence; if he is disposed, he will accept very weak evidence.”<sup>55</sup> Newman judges that half the controversies in the world are verbal ones that could be terminated if the parties engaged could see that their difference is one of first principles, for “when men understand each other’s meaning, they see, for the most part, that controversy is either superfluous or hopeless.”<sup>56</sup>

Newman is concerned to show, despite his contrast between analytical reason and faith, that faith does possess an explicitly rational element. Nevertheless, faith can be complete without this rational reflective process, as important as it may be in many circumstances. Faith, for example, is not dependent on creeds and rational evidence, or every child and every peasant must be a theologian. But neither is it the case that faith should “be disjoined from dogmatic and argumentative statements,” for to do so would be “to discard the science of theology from the service of Religion.”<sup>57</sup> Newman argues that there are, in fact, two processes of the mind distinct from one another, but properly denoted as unconscious and conscious

<sup>51</sup> *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, eds. Charles Stephen Dessain et al. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 11:293.

<sup>52</sup> Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, 187–90.

<sup>53</sup> Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, 191.

<sup>54</sup> Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, 194.

<sup>55</sup> J. H. Newman, “Love the Safeguard of Faith against Superstition,” in *Fifteen Sermons*, 226.

<sup>56</sup> J. H. Newman, “Faith and Reason, Contrasted as Habits of Mind,” in *Fifteen Sermons*, 200–1.

<sup>57</sup> J. H. Newman, “Implicit and Explicit Reason,” in *Fifteen Sermons*, 254.

reasoning, or what he calls Implicit and Explicit Reason. "All men have a reason, but not all men can give a reason."<sup>58</sup> Unconscious or implicit reason is described by Newman as "a living spontaneous energy" of the mind that "ranges to and fro in a way that "baffles investigation." It gains "by a probability here, an association, a testimony, an inward instinct, a received law," while not leaving a recognizable trace that would be logically perceivable to another person.<sup>59</sup> While explicit reason is the process of investigating our reasonings, not every person reflects upon his or her own reasonings or is able to do justice to his or her understanding or its cumulative force. Moreover, analytical reasoning is not subtle enough to represent thoroughly or adequately the state of mind by which we implicitly reason. In this regard it is like remembering. As we remember "better or worse on different subject-matters, so we reason better or worse." "The gift or talent of reasoning may be distinct in different subjects," as a man can be a genius on one subject and quite ignorant or naïve about another subject of existential import.<sup>60</sup>

Newman's theological papers and journal entries between the 1840s and 1870 show the extent to which he sought to refine and clarify the themes worked out in the *Sermons*, especially what he considered his most "original" ideas regarding "antecedent probabilities" and the "converging evidences" that lead to belief and certainty.<sup>61</sup> In the *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), one interrelated theme stands out that bears further comment, namely, his discussion of inference, assent, and certitude. The context is Newman's dissatisfaction with John Locke's influential doctrine and ethic of belief. Locke asserted that there is one unerring mark of the lover of truth, namely, "not entertaining any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant."<sup>62</sup> Newman challenges Locke's understanding 1) of inference and assent as entailing one and the same mental activity; 2) that there are degrees of assent, since a person is morally obliged to proportion his or her assent to the evidence; and 3) that probabilities should never lead to a certitude.

Newman argues that Locke's rigorous standard of belief simply is not related to how we do, in fact, assent to propositions as true. Inference, for Newman, is the giving of reasons for making an assertion of fact, for example, that it will rain this afternoon. But such reasons or inferences are not the same as assent, since one can be present when the other is absent, for example, when we continue to

<sup>58</sup> Newman, "Implicit and Explicit Reason," 259.

<sup>59</sup> Newman, "Implicit and Explicit Reason," 257.

<sup>60</sup> Newman, "Implicit and Explicit Reason," 259–60.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., the numerous papers on these subjects in *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty*, eds. Hugo M. de Achaval, S.J., and J. Derek Holmes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

<sup>62</sup> John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894), 2:428–9.

assent to a belief after we no longer can marshal the evidence; nor do inferences and assent vary concomitantly or proportionally since, for example, assent often ceases while the previous evidence remains in force in the mind. In concrete matters, in contrast to the abstractness of logical sequence, the mind's inferential work is more informal and untidy, in which a mass of observations and ideas converge upon one another and elicit a full assent that is not reducible to a summary or articulation of its parts, that is, its antecedent evidence. Most importantly, the process of informal concrete reasoning is always particular to the individual and always will vary in the evidence, its number, character, and estimated value. This personal act of assent is an act of judgment that determines when a person is justified in being certain. In the *Essay*, Newman coined the term 'Illative Sense' when referring to this judgment of "the ratiocinative faculty."<sup>63</sup>

Newman's reflections on the personal process that leads to assent is often compelling, and one can understand his concern to contrast assent with inference and the empiricists' insistence on scientific proof. Locke, too, had recognized the limits of any claim to an undoubted knowledge or proof. Yet, he wrote that "some of them *border so near* upon certainty that we make no doubt about them, but *assent* to them as firmly ... as if they were infallibly demonstrated."<sup>64</sup> Where, then, do Newman and Locke differ with regard to warranted belief?

Locke not only requires that a proposition be warranted by reasons, whether fully remembered or wholly articulate, but also insists that there are degrees of assent and certainty. This latter point Newman adamantly rejects. Most of the Victorian critics of Newman's *Grammar of Assent* agreed with Locke and focused their critiques of Newman on his insistence that assent does not admit of degrees and is unconditional. They further rejected Newman's contention that Locke's degrees of assent could not reach a condition of reasonable assent to propositions (or beliefs) "as if they were infallibly demonstrated." Nor, they argued, is Newman right in insisting that a conditional assent cannot be a firm, and a morally warranted, guide to action. Newman's defense of an unconditional assent was perceived by both critics and defenders as the weakest link in his elaborate and subtle essay on belief.

The further charge – that Newman's grammar of religious assent is merely a brilliant analysis of the *psychology* of belief and not a defense of reasonably warranted belief – is not an adequate assessment. Recent commentators generally agree that while Newman opposed the agnostic empiricists' call for a "wait and see" suspension of assent and belief, he was not advocating a mere will to believe,

<sup>63</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, ed. I. T. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 222–3. The critical edition of the *Essay*.

<sup>64</sup> Locke, *Essay*, 2:364.

an irrational “leap of faith.” Newman saw religious belief as engaging the whole person – the affections, the will, *and* the intellect. And he understood the “illative sense” as leading to an intellectual judgment as the converging evidence becomes compelling. A person does not *leap* to a conclusion but rather *grows into it*, although the assent may be sudden.<sup>65</sup>

This process that reaches a condition of certitude, “a state of mind definite and complete,” has been clarified by the concept of a “critical threshold” – alluded to by Newman in his use of the image of boiling water. When heated water boils at a critical threshold, a qualitative change takes place, since any increase in temperature after that point is superfluous. A significant feature of the idea of a critical threshold is the coherence of both continuity and discontinuity in the process. In reaching certitude there is a *qualitative* change. Thus, while the movement to certitude is not merely a *quantitative* cumulation by degrees, it is, nevertheless, secured in those occasions that precede it. “Evidence, like heat, can be registered during a process, even though the qualitative transition only occurs after the critical threshold is reached.”<sup>66</sup>

For Newman assent and certitude are not the result of a “blind leap” but of cumulative precedents involving historical events, personal experience, recognized authorities, reasonable ideas, among other compelling factors. Locke and Newman may be more in agreement on the process of reaching warranted belief and assent than is generally recognized, but they disagree substantively on the unconditional nature of certitude.

In conclusion, it can be said that most of the post-Enlightenment thinkers here discussed were not despisers of modernity. Rather, they understood their role as entailing a recreative appropriation and defense of elements of the Christian tradition through an engagement with and critique of philosophical currents of their time. In carrying out their task it was often the case that these writers also enriched one’s understanding of aspects of the religious tradition itself.

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<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Lash, “Introduction to John Henry Newman,” in *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1979), 12ff.

<sup>66</sup> M. Jamie Ferreira, “The Grammar of the Heart: Newman on Faith and Imagination,” in *Discourse and Context: An Interdisciplinary Study of John Henry Newman*, ed. Gerard Magill (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 137.

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**VII**

**SOCIETY**





## PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSES TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

FREDERICK C. BEISER AND PAMELA EDWARDS

The impact of the French Revolution on European thought is arguably too eccentric, particular, and profound to characterize with any degree of uniformity or indeed certainty. As a massive historical event of cataclysmic proportion, the revolution irrevocably altered the most basic institutions of political, social, and civil life. Its consequences, both for private individuals and for state actors, were conditioned by very particular and specific contexts. For this reason, it may be argued that the revolution not only lends itself more naturally to historical rather than philosophical explanations, it necessitates them. In this light, the philosophical recovery of the French Revolution produced accounts of its meaning that inevitably grappled with perceptions and understandings of history, human agency, and time. Moreover, such accounts suggested that the forces of change were not self-explanatory and that they must be considered as ideas in themselves. For many British observers, the French Revolution was perceived as a distorted memory of their own political and cultural past, of Great Rebellions and Glorious Revolutions. For those who watched anxiously, or aduly, in German states, the revolution in France was seen as a novel event and as a harbinger of things to come. But whether to embrace the winds of change or to retreat from them was the salient question. To the extent that the British and German experiences suggested very different conceptions of revolutionary change, it is possible to argue that while the revolution produced a conservative reaction to radical Enlightenment in Prussia, English responses were moderated by a longer set of reformist traditions and grounded in a new and self-conscious awareness of the meaning of history.

While there were certainly radicals among British philosophers who were forward-looking and modern in their outlook, that very optimism was conditioned by a deep reaction to the traditions and precedents of England's ancient constitution and common law. Much of the British Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had been a vindication of either the classical republican thought or ancient constitutionalism of the Whigs. Even skeptical Whigs like David Hume and Adam Smith understood social, political, and moral economies in

terms of historical conventions and customary usages. German thinkers, by contrast, contemplated the project for human improvement with reference either to the Prussian absolute state or to the older medieval models of clerical, aristocratic, or burgess oligarchy. In either case the republican or constitutional model was not an established convention, but a future possibility as yet untried. For these philosophers the radical break with the Enlightenment, which the revolution was held to have accomplished, suggested, whether as a point of pessimism or of optimistic audacity, that the road ahead was entirely new.

## GERMAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

### *Impact of the Revolution*

It is a truism to say that the French Revolution had a profound effect on German philosophy. It is indeed safe to claim that no single political event had such a deep, broad, and lasting impact upon it. With hindsight, it is easy to say this now. But it is noteworthy, indeed uncanny, how contemporaries themselves realized, almost immediately, the significance of the event. November 21, 1792, Georg Forster wrote to his friend Voss: "It is one of the decisive epochs of world history; since the birth of Christianity there has been nothing like it."<sup>1</sup> After witnessing the French victory at Valmy, which seemed to secure the cause of the revolution, Goethe famously declared to his assembled friends: "Here and today commences a new epoch of world-history, and you can say that you were present at its birth."<sup>2</sup> The revolution in the political world seemed to create a revolution in the intellectual world, a sense that everything was uncertain, that everything would change, and nothing could ever be the same again. Such was the assessment of Karl Leonhard Reinhold, Kantian publicist and *Aufklärer*, who wrote in 1790:

The most conspicuous and characteristic feature of our age is the convulsion of all hitherto familiar systems, theories and manners of thinking, a convulsion the breadth and depth of which the history of the human mind can show no example.<sup>3</sup>

What were these convulsions? What effects, broadly speaking, did the revolution have upon German philosophy? The most obvious and immediate result was the *reorientation* of German political thought, the pressing need to respond to the challenges of the revolution. After the storming of the Bastille in July 1789, German thinkers faced the urgent and inevitable question whether their lands

<sup>1</sup> Georg Forster, *Werke in vier Bänden*, ed. Gerhard Steiner (Frankfurt: Insel, 1967–70), 4:794.

<sup>2</sup> P. Hume Brown, *Life of Goethe* (New York: Haskell House, 1971), 2:418.

<sup>3</sup> K. L. Reinhold, *Briefe über die kantische Philosophie*, ed. Raymond Schmidt (Leipzig: Reclam, 1923), 1:24.

should follow the example of their French neighbor and proceed down the path toward republicanism. No longer could they take for granted the old status quo. During the eighteenth century, there had been a prolonged dispute concerning the relative merits of enlightened absolutism versus the old *Ständestaat*, the small provincial state governed by local aristocrats and wealthy bourgeois. Both parties to the dispute took it for granted that these were the main alternatives; republicanism, even of a moderate kind, was not an option.

After the Constituent Assembly, however, republicanism seemed not only an option but an imperative. There would continue to be spirited defenses of enlightened absolutism and the *Ständestaaten* throughout the 1790s, but they would no longer be undertaken on the same terms, as if they were the only alternatives.

Another less obvious, but no less significant, result of the revolution was the *increasing politicization* of German thought, the growing extent to which philosophers discussed political issues and theories and placed them in the forefront of their concerns. It would be a mistake to describe politicization as a new development, as if German intellectuals had little or no interest in politics before the revolution. The popular idea of the apolitical German is a myth, an anachronism committed by those who construe all political activity in modern terms. There were established traditions of political thought in Germany well before the revolution: the natural law tradition of Leibniz, Pufendorf, and Wolff; the cameralist tradition of Seckendorff, Justi, and Sonnenfels; and the apologists for the *Kleinstaat* of the Holy Roman Empire, of whom J. J. Moser, F. C. Moser, and Justus Möser were the most striking examples. Furthermore, beginning in the 1770s, there was a growing interest in political affairs in Germany among the broader public.<sup>4</sup> It was a legacy of the Enlightenment that people felt a greater entitlement to discuss public matters. Reading societies, Masonic lodges, and periodicals became popular locales for political discussion. Nevertheless, whatever tendencies toward politicization that were present before the revolution were intensified and multiplied after it. This is evident from the proliferation in the 1790s of political treatises, journals, articles, pamphlets, and newspapers. Now politics became the dominant concern of German intellectual life. Such, indeed, was the increasing importance of politics that it replaces religion as the chief source of schism and controversy in German intellectual life.

The response to the revolution gave rise to three strands or schools of thought in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Although they were already present in some inchoate and implicit form before the revolution, they became more organized and explicit afterward.

<sup>4</sup> See James Sheehan, *German History, 1770–1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 190–3.

<sup>5</sup> For a further explanation and defense of these distinctions, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution & Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 13–22, 222–7, 281–8.

None of them was organized into parties in the modern sense, and the terms we now use to refer to them are anachronistic:<sup>6</sup> 1) *Liberalism*: The liberals held that the purpose of the state is to protect the rights of citizens and to grant them as much liberty as possible compatible with a like liberty for others. Liberals decidedly rejected, therefore, the paternalism of the old *Ständestaat* and enlightened absolutism, which claimed to know what is in the best interests of a citizen. Among the chief liberals in Germany were Kant, Jacobi, Humboldt, Schiller, and Forster. 2) *Conservatism*: German conservatism in the 1790s and early 1800s defends either the old *Ständestaat* or enlightened absolutism. Among the apologists for the *Ständestaat* were Möser and the Hanoverian Whigs (Rehberg, Brandes, and Spittler); among the champions of enlightened absolutism were the Berlin *Aufklärer* (Eberhard, Garve, Nicolai, Svarez) and the eudemonists (E. A. Göchhausen, August Starck, J. K. Riese, L. A. Grolmann). The characteristic features of German conservatism in these years – whether its ideal constitution was absolutist or corporatist – were its defense of paternalism and its critique of the liberal principle that each individual knew best his own interests. While some of the conservatives were willing to reform the old order to approximate some of the ideals of the revolution, they were all unwilling to allow for republicanism, the doctrine that the people had the right to participate in the affairs of the state. 3) *Romanticism*: The early romantics – Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Schleiermacher, Hölderlin, Schelling – affirmed many of the basic ideals of the revolution, such as the rights of man, liberty, and equality, but, unlike the liberals, they wanted to incorporate them within an ideal of community, which was modeled on the ancient republics or the corporate order of the Middle Ages. The purpose of the state was not simply to protect the rights of citizens, but to lead them toward the good life. The romantics feared the egoism and competitive free-for-all of liberal society and held that the state should serve higher cultural ends. The romantics were aligned with the conservatives in their mistrust of the new liberal society and in their allegiance to the ideal of community; they differed from them, however, in their acceptance of republican ideals.

Seen from a still broader perspective, one profound effect of the revolution on German intellectual life was the demise of the *Aufklärung*. Given that the *Aufklärung* had dominated German culture throughout most of the eighteenth century, this amounted to a major transformation of the intellectual landscape.

<sup>6</sup> On the early use of the term “liberal” in Germany, see Fritz Valjavec, *Die Entstehung der politischen Strömungen in Deutschland* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1952), 426–9; and the article “Liberalismus” by U. Dierse, R. K. Hoyer, and H. Dräger, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, eds. J. Ritter and K. Gründer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 5:256–71. On the early use of *romantisch* and *Romantik*, see Ernst Behler, *Frühromantik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 9–29.

One of the chief reasons for this change is that before the revolution, many *Aufklärer* were closely associated with and implicated in the cause of enlightened absolutism. The purpose of enlightenment, they believed, was less to make the public to participate in politics than to ensure that the ruler govern according to principles of justice and public utility. The revolution, however, discredited enlightened absolutism, and by association the many *Aufklärer* who supported it. Enlightened absolutism left no room for popular participation in government; however enlightened a monarch, his government was at best *for* the people, never *by* them. One of the chief legacies of the revolution, however, was the right of the citizen to have some share in government. From the vantage point of the younger generation who supported republican ideals, the *Aufklärung* seemed nothing more than a rotting relic of the ancien régime, as musty and fusty as the perukes crowning the *Aufklärers'* heads.

If a younger and more radical generation associated the *Aufklärung* with the defunct cause of enlightened absolutism, an older and more conservative generation linked it with the dangerous cause of revolution and Jacobinism. In the early 1790s many observers saw the revolution as the triumph of Enlightenment, as the victory of the cause of reason in the political world. The ideals of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité* and the rights of man were seen as the incarnation of the principles of reason, as the embodiment of the doctrine of natural law, which had been championed by the *Aufklärer* for decades. This view is expressed with perfect concision by the young Friedrich Gentz in a letter to Christian Garve, December 5, 1790: "The Revolution constitutes the first practical triumph of philosophy, the first example in the history of the world of the construction of government upon the principles of an orderly, rationally constructed system."<sup>7</sup> But such was the course of events in France that what first seemed a triumph turned into a disaster. All the strife, terror, and chaos in France seemed to be the inevitable result of the Enlightenment's grand but naive attempt to recreate all of society and state according to the general principles of natural law. Filled with a naive enthusiasm for the principles of reason, the *philosophes* in France – the cousins of the *Aufklärer* in Germany – had swept away all historical traditions and institutions, removing all the restraints on *la canaille* and leaving nothing to build upon but rubble. The inevitable results were mob violence and constant instability, the succession of one paper constitution after another. For an older generation, such anarchy and strife seemed to be the direct result of the attempt to impose the ideals of the Enlightenment. So, whether seen from the Left or the Right, youth or the aged, the *Aufklärung* had been discredited by the revolution in France.

<sup>7</sup> *Briefe von und an Gentz*, eds. F. C. Wittichen and Ernst Salzer, 3 vols. (Munich: Oldenbourg 1909–13), 1:178.

Still another important effect of the revolution – the obverse of the decline of the *Aufklärung* – was the rise of historicism. This, too, amounts to a major shift in intellectual landscape, given that historicism would become a dominant and defining force in nineteenth-century Germany. ‘Historicism’ is an anachronistic term, which became commonplace to describe an intellectual movement only in the 1930s.<sup>8</sup> Although the origins of historicism lie deep within the *Aufklärung* itself, it is generally accepted that the reaction against the revolution greatly strengthened and accelerated its progress. What, more precisely, is historicism? We can define historicism in a general sense as the doctrine that the identity of all social, political, and cultural phenomena depends on their specific historical context. Historicism stresses the radical context-dependency of such phenomena, that is, that they do not exist apart from their context and that they would be something else in a different context. Such a doctrine involves two more specific propositions: first, that each of these contexts is unique and individual, forming an irreducible whole that is more than the sum of its parts; second, that each of these contexts is radically historical, such that its identity changes in time. Together, both propositions mean that social, political, and cultural phenomena are unique and individual because their identity depends on their specific place in history. This doctrine would become explicit and systematic only later in the nineteenth century, in such thinkers as Ranke, Dilthey, and Droysen, but it is possible to find clear anticipations of it in the late eighteenth century, in such writers as Hamann, Herder, and Möser.<sup>9</sup>

Historicism grew out of the reaction to the revolution chiefly because it seemed to support more conservative attitudes toward social change. It appeared to be the intellectual antidote for the reckless idealism of the Enlightenment, which had been responsible for so much anarchy, strife, and bloodshed in France. Historicism fostered more conservative attitudes in two respects: First, it stressed the importance of *historical sense*, that is, recognition that society and state are formed by history and that they are the result of tradition, so that we should respect the past rather than attempting to abolish it. Second, it encouraged a *feeling for the social and political organism*, that is, recognition that society and state are

<sup>8</sup> On the complicated history of the term, see the “Historismus, Historizismus” by G. Scholtz in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, eds. J. Ritter and K. Gründer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 3:1141–7; Erich Rothacker, “Historismus,” *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 62 (1938): 388–99, and “Das Wort ‘Historismus,’” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Wortforschung* 16 (1960): 3–6; and the article “Historicism” by George Iggers in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. P. Wiener (New York: Scribner, 1973), 2:456–64.

<sup>9</sup> The classic account of the origins of historicism is Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, eds. Hans Herzfeld, Carl Hinrichs, and Walther Hofer (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1965), vol. 3 of *Werke*, eds. Hans Herzfeld, Carl Hinrichs, and Walther Hofer (Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler, 1957).

unique wholes, whose entire identity is changed if we alter even a single part of them. Both attitudes meant that all social and political change should be gradual and piecemeal.

The two main effects of the revolution on German philosophy – the decline of the Enlightenment and the rise of historicism – stood in inverse ratio to one another. The star of historicism rose as that of the *Aufklärung* fell. The growth of historicist attitudes in the early nineteenth century accelerated the decline of the *Aufklärung* because historicism questioned some two fundamental tenets of the *Aufklärung*. One of these tenets was natural law, the doctrine that there are universal moral standards that hold throughout history and that apply to all societies, states, and cultures. The Enlightenment made the law of nature into its standard of critique, the measure of the moral value of all societies, states, and cultures. Historicism undermined, however, the very possibility of a natural law, for if we investigate human values historically, we see that their meaning and purpose depend entirely on their specific context, their precise role in a social-historical whole. Since values depend on their context and since these contexts change and vary, human values also change and vary with them. Since, furthermore, these contexts are unique and individual, it follows that the values that are part of them should be incommensurable, so that there is no common standard to judge them. It is indeed impossible to generalize about values, as if what held true in one society and culture should hold in another. What results from any attempt to generalize is only the hypostasized or illegitimately universalized version of the values of one culture. Whenever the Enlightenment passed judgment on past societies or alien cultures, these would turn out to be, as soon as one scratched underneath the surface, nothing more than the standards of eighteenth-century Europe.

Another characteristic value of the *Aufklärung* is self-thought (*Selbstdenken*), that is, the demand that the individual think for himself, accepting only those beliefs for which there is sufficient evidence. All beliefs that were not supported by evidence were to be discarded as mere prejudice or superstition. This principle of the Enlightenment was challenged by Burke, who, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, famously declared that prejudice “renders a man’s virtue his habit.”<sup>10</sup> However, this principle had been questioned much earlier in Germany by two thinkers crucial in the development of historicism: Herder and Möser. In the 1770s they asked whether the Enlightenment’s demand for radical criticism simply missed the point. Although many of our beliefs would perhaps prove to be prejudices when examined strictly according to the evidence for them, they

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Dent, 1912), 84. The influence of Burke’s *Reflections* on German political thinking in the 1790s has been greatly exaggerated. On this issue, see Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism*, 287–8.



were still crucial for life and action. They were important not only to motivate the individual, but also to create social solidarity and political stability. We should value our beliefs not so much according to the evidence, they suggested, but more according to the role they play in moral and political life. Hence the young Herder noted that many of our beliefs, though perhaps fictions, were still necessary to make a people happy and to give their life cohesion and meaning.<sup>11</sup> And Möser was convinced that illusion is crucial to the fabric of social and political life. He thought that it was fine that we used our reason to see through these illusions, but he insisted all the same that was no reason to reject them. "The English," he once wrote, "distinguish their king from common mortals, and dress him with the most magnificent splendour, but they know well that he is a human being just like everyone else."<sup>12</sup>

### *Debate About the Revolution*

However great the impact of the revolution had been on German philosophy, the major philosophical issue posed by it was not new. This issue had been debated by German philosophers throughout the eighteenth century, and it arose whenever they discussed the limits of Enlightenment. It had been indeed the chief concern of Kant's critical philosophy, whose three *Kritiken* would attempt to resolve it systematically and conclusively. What was this issue? To put it in a single phrase, it was the authority of reason. Why should we give authority to reason rather than other sources of belief, such as Scripture, tradition, and inspiration? What are the limits of reason? Does it have the power to justify our moral, religious, and common sense beliefs? Or does following it lead to a complete skepticism? These questions first arose in the 1720s in the context of the controversies surrounding Wolff's rationalism. The Wolffians argued that reason has the power to demonstrate our basic moral, religious, and common sense beliefs; their pietist opponents countered that reason, if pushed to its limits, ends in the atheism and fatalism of Spinozism. These issues were raised anew in the 1780s during the disputes concerning Kant's critical philosophy. Now, however, the focus was less on the possibility of Wolffian metaphysics, which Kant's critique had devastated, than on the possibility of Kantian epistemology itself. The basic issue was *meta-critical*: How is a critique of pure reason possible? Does reason have the power to determine the conditions and limits of knowledge, and can it establish a tribunal of criticism valid for all cultures and epochs?

<sup>11</sup> J. G. Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmann, 1891), 5:510.

<sup>12</sup> J. J. Möser, "Wer die Kunst verstand, verriet den Meister nicht," in *Sämtliche Werke, Historisch-kritisch Ausgabe* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, 1944), 10:204–5.

The French Revolution posed yet again the problem of the authority of reason, though now the problem would assume a new form, becoming much more practical and political. Before the revolution, the problem concerned essentially the limits of *theoretical* reason, the power of reason in metaphysics or epistemology. After the revolution, the problem involved more the limits of *practical* reason, especially the power of reason to guide our conduct in the social and political world. This issue was raised anew by the revolution chiefly because the French radicals had appealed to reason to justify the revolution. It was in the name of reason that they defended their ideals of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*; that they swept away the historical traditions and institutions of France; and that they conceived and executed the Terror. According to such radicals as Robespierre, Sieyès, and Saint-Just, reason is the source of our fundamental moral principles, which are binding on us in politics no less than in everyday life. Since, however, the present laws and institutions of France violate these principles, since they make it impossible to fulfill our duty to act on them, we are not only permitted but obliged to abolish them. Indeed, it is reason that prescribes the use of force against counter-revolutionaries, for reason demands that we use every means necessary to achieve its ends, and the only effective measure against counterrevolutionary force is greater revolutionary force. Hence even the Terror seemed to receive the sanction of reason itself.

In focusing on the practical powers of reason, the debate on the revolution coincided with the already heated controversy surrounding Kant's practical philosophy, which began in the late 1780s. The main question behind Kant's *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* – “Is pure reason practical?” – is a perfect epitome of the chief issue behind the revolution. In the second *Kritik* Kant had argued that pure reason is indeed practical, and in two senses: First, it has the power to determine the moral principles that guide our conduct. Reason requires that we conceive and act according to universal laws, and universalizability provides a sufficient test or criterion to ascertain what should be the maxims of our conduct. Second, reason also has the power to serve as an incentive for our conduct, such that if we know what it prescribes we also have the motive and power to execute it. The chief incentive of moral conduct, Kant argued, is nothing less than respect for the moral law, a pure feeling prescribed by reason itself. In his famous “Theory-Practice” essay of 1793,<sup>13</sup> Kant took his argument in behalf of the practical powers of reason a daring step further. He now argued that reason is practical in a third sense, because its principles are also binding in the realm of politics. Reason

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Ueber den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis,” in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1900–), 7:273–314.

has the power to determine not only the general principles of morality, Kant now contended, but also the specific principles of the state. From his categorical imperative he derived the necessity of a constitution consisting in principles of liberty and equality, much like those already established in France.

Given that there was already a lively debate concerning Kant's ethics in the late 1780s, it was only natural that much of the debate on the revolution would be couched in Kantian terms. It seemed to many, both radicals and conservatives alike, that Kant's philosophy had justified the claims of reason of the revolutionaries across the Rhine. It was widely rumoured in Berlin that Kant's sympathies were with the revolution and that he was a Jacobin. To combat these very rumors, Kant had argued in the "Theory-Practice" essay that reason forbids any right of revolution, that is, that it is impossible to universalize the principle that we should change constitutions by force. Despite these stratagems, Kant's philosophy was still taken as Jacobin by public and government alike. Given Kant's growing prominence in German philosophy and given the radicalism associated with his ethics, it is scarcely surprising that the most famous debate on the revolution centered around Kant's "Theory-Practice" essay. This essay became the subject of a fierce dispute among Kant, Rehberg, Gentz, Garve, and Möser in the pages of the *Berlinisches Monatsschrift*.<sup>14</sup>

This dispute was very complex and wide-ranging, involving four more specific issues, all of them variations on the general question whether pure reason is practical. First, does reason alone have the power to determine the basic principles of conduct? Is Kant's criterion of universalizability a sufficient criterion to distinguish between good and bad maxims? Or is it also necessary to consult experience, that is, to determine the principles of conduct by considering their utility or consequences? Second, assuming that pure reason has the power to determine the general principles of conduct, does it also have the power to determine the specific principles of the state? Or is it the case that these general principles are so indeterminate that they are compatible with all kinds of different political constitutions? Third, assuming that reason does have the power to determine even the specific principles of the state, does it have the power to provide sufficient motive for acting on them? In other words, are human beings so constituted that the rationality of a principle gives them enough incentive to act on it? Or are self-interest, habit, and tradition the chief springs of human conduct? Fourth, assuming that reason could determine specific principles of state and that people could act on them psychologically, would they still be able to act on them in the political world, where statesmen are often forced to violate moral principles for the state to survive?

<sup>14</sup> On this debate, see Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism*, 288–309, 317–26.

These issues were sometimes formulated in the following terms: What should be the ultimate standard of political judgment, theory or practice? Here 'theory' stood for the principles of morality, insofar as they were determined by pure reason and held to be binding in politics. 'Practice' stood for the established traditions and institutions of a country, insofar as they were validated by experience and, more specifically, the accumulated experience of generations, "the wisdom of our ancestors." The Left stressed the rights of theory over practice; the conservatives emphasized the rights of practice over theory. The Left, therefore, stood for the *powers* of reason in politics, its capacity to determine the specific principles of the state, whereas conservatives stressed the *limits* of reason in politics, its incapacity to determine these limits and the necessity to consult experience. The center held that reason has some qualified importance in politics, insofar as it lays down the principles of morality, which are general or limiting requirements for any state, but it also stressed the importance of experience to qualify these principles and to determine the specific principles of the state.

Regarding the first, second, and fourth issues, three positions were taken during the theory-practice dispute. There was first the radical rationalist position, which was represented by Kant and Fichte. They argued that a) reason has the power to determine the first principles of morality, that b) these principles are binding in politics, and that c) reason also has the capacity to determine the specific principles of the state. There was then the moderate rationalist or qualified empiricist position, which was represented by Gentz and Rehberg. They contended that a) reason has indeed the power to determine the first principles of morality, that b) these moral principles are too abstract and general to settle the specific form of a political constitution, and that c) to determine that specific form it is necessary to consult experience, which involves considering specific circumstances and tradition. Finally, there was the radical empiricist position, which was represented by Möser and Garve. They held that a) reason alone cannot determine the first principles of morality, let alone the state; that b) to determine these principles it is necessary to consult experience; and that c) experience consists in the cumulative wisdom of generations.

## BRITISH RESPONSES TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

### *Political and Philosophical Contexts*

It may be argued that the very constitutional arrangements of the British church-state are a reflection of the qualified empiricism at the heart of British philosophy. Or that, in the alternative, British philosophical discourse during the long eighteenth century was an extension of the ongoing and dialogic nature of Scots

moderation, Anglican latitude, balanced constitutionalism, and national union. But the force of the revolution in France and the reform crisis at home were to polarize the political and intellectual arguments of the age.

While subtler and more nuanced positions would reassert themselves with regard to speculative and esoteric matters, the religious question and its concomitant discussions of morality, design, and nature were always understood by late British Enlightenment thinkers as inherently political questions. For this reason, British philosophical opinion in the nineteenth century was divided between idealists and materialist, or utilitarian, critics of the French Revolution, so much so that by 1839 John Stuart Mill would describe Bentham and Coleridge “as the two great seminal minds of the age,”<sup>15</sup> asserting that the tension between the rival philosophical schools of radical utilitarianism and romantic idealism defined the intellectual life of the nineteenth century. Mill accepted and translated Coleridge’s characterization of human nature as it pertained to the history of philosophy, recalling in 1840 that “Coleridge used to say that every one is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian: it may be similarly affirmed, that every Englishman of the present day is by implication either a Benthamite or a Coleridgean.”<sup>16</sup> Some modern, twentieth-century critics have been capable of even grander claims for the age. Alfred Cobban famously described romanticism as constituting a “revolt against the eighteenth century.”<sup>17</sup> In this account, romanticism is associated with German as well as indigenous British strands of idealism. It is set against a ‘common sense’ and, some would argue, characteristically English, utilitarianism and materialism, as a philosophical and aesthetic response to the French Revolution. The assertion, implicit in this association, is that utilitarian and materialist arguments suggest pragmatic and, therefore, inherently political projects and that idealism constitutes a retreat from politics.<sup>18</sup>

Most British intellectual historians and literary critics have tended to follow Cobban’s lead in this but have amplified the contention to view British romanticism as a revolt against the Enlightenment itself and as a reaction against the Terror, which they take to have been the Enlightenment’s apotheosis. The practical logic of the Enlightenment ideal of ‘Liberty through Reason’ was, they

<sup>15</sup> John Stuart Mill, “Bentham,” *London and Westminster Review* 29 (August 1839).

<sup>16</sup> John Stuart Mill, “Coleridge,” *London and Westminster Review* 33 (March 1840).

<sup>17</sup> Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century: A Study of the Political Context and Social Thinking of Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1929).

<sup>18</sup> See E. P. Thompson, “Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon,” in *Power and Consciousness*, ed. Conor Cruise O’Brien and William Dean Vanech (London: London University Press, 1969), 149–81. Bertrand Russell takes the opposite view, associating idealism and romanticism with “titanism” and nationalist revolution. See *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945).

argue, translated ferociously into violent and radical action by the Jacobins. Yet, most contemporary British philosophical inclinations were to reject the revolution, either as an untenable utopian experiment or as a destructive and nihilistic attempt to sweep away the old order and establish a new society based on universal rational principles and claims of natural rights. But these responses can be traced to philosophical and political ideas that antedate the revolution and its tragic derailment in 1792. It would be wrong, therefore, to suggest that the revolution caused either a romantic revival of philosophical idealism or the materialist and utilitarian assumptions of the philosophical radicals. Rather, the revolution and its controversy polarized and accelerated these intellectual developments, so that by 1832 it would be impossible to consider either romanticism or radicalism without some spectral reference to Jacobinism.

British reactions, both political and philosophical, to the French Revolution were conditioned by Britain's own reformist traditions – its constitutional instruments and arguments – as they had progressed and developed between 1688 and 1789. Insofar as the French Revolution may be viewed as the culmination of European Enlightenment, the philosophical agendas of a specifically British 'Enlightenment Project' must be situated within these critical historical contests. Moreover, British thinkers had been profoundly aware of the great tide of history since their own revolution controversy and the post-1688 consolidations and contests that had followed it. Successive Jacobite rebellions had challenged the Williamite and early Hanoverian states, contending the divine rights and providential reckonings of kings and countrymen alike.

By 1789 and the arrival of the glorious 14th in Paris, British observers were contemplating their own place in time. The immediate political and social responses to the Gordon riots of 1780, the conclusion of the American crisis with the Treaty of Paris in 1783, and, perhaps most significantly, the anniversary celebrations in 1788 of the Glorious Revolution, all combined to establish the political conditions, no less the "historical sense," for the philosophical and intellectual debate that culminated in the British revolution controversy of the 1790s. Yet two questions drove the British debate on the revolution to a greater degree than any others. The first of these questions was which revolution did British philosophers consider to be the template for the revolution in France? Was 1789 a French rendering and reprise of 1688? Or perhaps a gloss on the American crisis of 1776? Or were observers like Forster and Rheinhold correct? Was the revolution unique in the annals of the Christian era and a novel innovation in its own right, "a convulsion the breadth and depth of which the human mind can show no example"? To many British witnesses, claims to the exceptionalism of the French experiment were less than persuasive. To a greater degree than its earlier influence on the American patriot arguments of the 1770s, the spirit of 1688

suffused the reform societies of the late 1780s and 1790s. The patron saint of these meetings and associations was John Locke. And it was the ghost of 1688 that suggested to many the second critical question of the British revolution controversy. What was the meaning of the Lockean legacy?

While Locke's philosophical reputation and immediate impact were reasonably minor at the beginning of the eighteenth century,<sup>19</sup> there was a great revival of interest in Lockean philosophy in the 1780s.<sup>20</sup> This was in part a consequence of the way in which Locke's political writings had been adopted by patriot and Whig ideologues and pamphleteers during the American Revolution. Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Government* provided the revolutionary rationale for Thomas Jefferson's customized account of the doctrine of natural rights, as Locke's life, liberty, and property were translated into Jefferson's life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The new question was whether property and the pursuit of happiness were synonymous or alternate possibilities, a question that lay at the heart of the civil moralism of Scots thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Hume by 1776.

While Jefferson's more radical assumptions should be considered in light of his epicurean and deist leanings, Locke had been a defender of the church, a republican apologist for the landed oligarchy, and most likely a Socinian in his religious sensibilities. His account of the doctrine of natural rights rested on theological natural law arguments that grounded principles of justice and right in deity, design, or a universal moral law of reason. Beyond this, Locke's religious writings on toleration and freedom of conscience were to have a significant impact, by the 1780s, on those rational dissenters like Richard Price and Joseph Priestley who argued from Unitarian principle for the importance of religious freedom and independence of conscience. Finally, Lockean epistemology, grounded as it was in a materialist empiricism, would also appeal by the 1780s and 1790s to religious skeptics and deists who, like David Hartley, rejected mystical, supernatural, or transcendental explanations for order, pursuing instead mechanical and associationist accounts of life and human nature. The complexity of the Lockean legacy by 1789 was such that both dissenting radicals from Priestley to Paine and moderate constitutionalist Whigs from Fox to Burke could and did claim their share of the Lockean inheritance. But a mixed religious and political parentage was the philosophical foundation of the British Enlightenment.

<sup>19</sup> See Melinda Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Mark Goldie, ed., *The Reception of Locke's Politics: From the 1690's to the 1830's*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto; Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing, 1999). Cf. vol. 4, *Political Reform in the Age of the French Revolution*.

*The Revolution Controversy, 1789–1797*

Richard Price fired the first salvo in the revolution controversy. Price had written in support of the American Revolution, as did Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine. As a Unitarian minister committed to the centrality of conscience and individual moral judgment in political and religious life he maintained that the citizenry had the absolute right to choose its government. In 1790 Price delivered a sermon in support of the French Revolution. His *Discourse on the Love of Country* emphasized arguments for popular sovereignty and the right of resistance. However, unlike the Whig ideal of popular sovereignty as expounded by Locke and later Burke, Price contended that sovereignty not only originated in the people but was a power that remained resident in the people. Locke had anchored sovereignty in a landed consensus, in the institutions of property and law. Beyond that he had argued for a right of resistance in extremis. Price contended that the people had a right to withdraw consent at will and that the people could and indeed ought to cashier their governors for misconduct. Popular sovereignty and the right of resistance were, Price contended, the true legacy of 1688.

Burke was appalled by Richard Price's radicalization of the revolution principles. A committed Whig, Burke argued in defense of the spirit of 1688 in both his prorevolutionary writings on America and his antirevolutionary writings against France. His reply to Price was given in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In *Reflections* Burke argued against abstract schemes of improvement, against the grandiose and utopian fantasies of "sophists, calculators and economists." He defended the sovereignty of the law as mediated through historical convention and customary right. He argued against the violence and destructive passions of the mob by making a case for private attachments, for sentiment and sympathy. One of Burke's central objections to the newly formed constituent or national assembly was its unicameralism. The concentration of political will into a single unified instrument of power unmediated by any balancing interests was an institutional parallel to the problem of the concentrated and consequently mindless opinion of the mob. The "Swinish Multitude" was, as Burke styled it, a herd animal incapable of private moral judgment or, more pointedly, of collective wisdom. The collective wisdom of the people was in Burke's account a historically constructed continuity of opinion and consent. The contract of sovereignty struck among "the living, the dead, and the as yet unborn" rendered the constitution a living and organic embodiment of precedent, statute, and customary right. The idea of Justice was for Burke grounded in the natural law, however it was enacted and revealed through the ever unfolding providence of the common law of England.



The fever pitch of the revolution controversy in England was sparked by Thomas Paine's 1791 reply to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Echoing the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, Paine wrote *The Rights of Man* in clear declaratory tones and published it in a cheap second edition in 1792. Its bold and simple vernacular style was intended to reach a far more popular audience than Burke's ornate and classically moderated rhetoric had. Paine argued against primogeniture and hereditary right; he scoffed at Burke's accounts of legitimacy vested in a continuity of consent originating in 1688 and the Williamite succession. Paine held that it was for each generation to make and repeal its own laws and grant or withhold its own consents: that, in short, the living could not be bound by the dead. He believed rights to originate in nature. Moreover, Paine argued that these same fundamental and universal rights could be translated as positive institutions into a constitutional declaration along the lines of the American Bill of Rights. Paine advocated unicameralism as a republican and democratical elimination of order and rank. He attacked privilege and antique tradition because they conferred monopoly in certain interests, but also because he viewed pomp, luxury, and the wasteful uses of courts as corrupt extravagances. In religious matters Paine was staunchly anticlerical and an avowed deist. But the most provocative component of his argument in *The Rights of Man* suggested a political and philosophical paradox to some.

If rights were universal and inalienable and if the people had the right to make and unmake the law as popular convenience saw fit, how could these universal and transcendent principles be translated into a limited civil construction such as a constitutional charter or declaration? And without some concrete civil expression were not natural rights merely an expression of principle rather than an active entitlement? In short, as many would later style it, where was the right without the remedy? Jeremy Bentham would for this reason and others describe the doctrine of natural rights as a nonsense upon stilts.<sup>21</sup>

Bentham had written in a variety of contexts on jurisprudence and morals since the 1770s, notably producing his *Fragment on Government* the same year as Adam Smith's publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, in conjunction with the American Revolution, in 1776. The *Fragment* generated some of the earliest and clearest statements of Bentham's legal positivism, being, in effect and by subtitle, a *Commentary on the Commentaries* of Sir William Blackstone. It is not surprising then that Bentham was an initial enthusiast for the rationalism and efficacy of the French Revolution and endorsed the project of the *Declaration of the Rights of*

<sup>21</sup> Jeremy Bentham, "Nonsense on Stilts, or Pandora's Box Opened, or the French Declaration of Rights Prefixed to the Constitution of 1791, Laid Open and Exposed," in *Rights, Representation and Reform, Nonsense on Stilts and Other Writings on the French Revolution*, eds. Philip Schofield, Catherine Pease-Watkins, and Cyprian Blamires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

*Man and the Citizen* as a written and thus civilly constructed charter of rights. His more complete account of the underlying principles of this pragmatically educed moral and political philosophy was indeed published the same year as the French Revolution in 1789. It is in this work, *The Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, that Bentham would give the clearest and most complete account of the theory of utility.

Bentham was sympathetic to the revolution's project as late as 1792, when he published a response to Mr. Justice Ashhurst, defending the revolution principles against Ashhurst's constitutional and common-law criticisms. *Truth vs. Ashhurst* was Bentham's defense of the revolution against Ashhurst's warnings to a Middlesex jury that the French Revolution and its democratical principles were seductive and dangerous. After the excesses of the September massacres and of the Terror that followed in 1792–4, Bentham became politically quiescent, and it is believed that his turn toward radical politics was a later development, occurring perhaps in 1808, through his friendship with James Mill. British utilitarians would, for the most part, reject the doctrine of transcendent and individual natural rights in favor of that maximization of collective interests and pleasures toward the greatest good of the greatest number. What some critics described as a hedonistic calculus of interests, others would characterize as the Dismal Science. Coleridge contended that utilitarianism was the modern Jacobinism and that it was the final logic of Lockean materialism wedded to the principle of Association and Common Sense. It was, nonetheless, the anarchism of William Godwin that most effectively countered Paine's democratical and common sense gloss on Locke with an account of right reason, universal benevolence, and the doctrine of disinterest.

Godwin wrote with a variety of hats, and by 1792 he had written a good deal of constitutional history. His response to the rights of man controversy was to produce his own account of political principles and human society. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice* was published in two volumes in January 1793 but produced subsequent and revised editions in 1795 and 1797, in close proximity to the new French Constitution of 1795 and Bonaparte's establishment of the sister republics in 1797. *Political Justice* emphasized the primacy of Duties over Rights. It situated Justice in the individual conscience, operating by the lights of right reason, in accordance with the dutiful exercise of a disinterested Benevolence. Godwin believed that private attachments and sympathies obscured the urgings of conscience and reason. They were selfish and interested impulses and not conducive to the exercise of Duty. The consequence of this argument was to affirm Godwin as the father of philosophical anarchism. To exercise one's moral judgment and to act benevolently and with disinterest would render government, law, and contract superfluous. Even marriage and

concerts were rejected by Godwin as oppressive arrangements that undermined the voluntarism that must be the foundation of a just society. Such coercive institutions retarded the moral development of man, so Godwin thought, and certainly he was an advocate of the idea of improvement and of the possibility of human perfection both moral and physical. Indeed, Godwin believed that health and aging could eventually be controlled by the action of the Will and that man might one day become immortal. But for all of Godwin's emphasis on the free and virtuous force of reason and disinterest, his 1795 edition incorporated a new chapter, "The Empire of Feeling."

Both rational materialists such as Godwin and, if we are to accept his Lockean assumptions, empirical materialists such as Paine found ways of integrating ideas of common sense into their accounts of human nature. For Paine, common sense produced a practical and experiential foundation for rights and natural law. For Godwin, it was the source of a good deal of misapprehension and mischief. But there were other descendants of the idea that common experience grounded in the senses might provide a solid foundation for the perception of truths, universal and inalienable. Thomas Reid was a founding proponent of the doctrine of common sense. But it was Reid's student Dugald Stewart who produced a more comprehensive ethical and aesthetic account of imagination. Stewart began writing drafts of the work that became *The Philosophy of the Human Mind* while still a student in Glasgow in the 1770s, and these early drafts were written in close proximity to those philosophical responses to the crisis in America that had prompted both Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Bentham's *Fragment of Government*. But *Philosophy of the Human Mind* was published in 1792, the same year as the commencement of the Terror in France. As a contribution to the school of common sense and in conjunction with Paine's *Rights of Man*, it was a more intense and far-reaching consideration of the ideas of association and sympathy than that which had undergirded the philosophy of the Scots economists of the 1770s and their utilitarian disciples. The key advance on Reid's school of common sense, to be derived from Stewart's work, was to be found in the theory of imagination. Stewart conceived of imagination as an active faculty, one that constructed the conditions for pity or sympathy through a willed projection of associated sentiments.

Stewart had a significant influence on Coleridge, who used aspects of Stewart's theories to modify his own reformulation of Kantian categories in *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge replaced Kant's conceptions of Reason and Understanding with Reason and Imagination.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, he incorporated a more active and

<sup>22</sup> Coleridge is largely credited with introducing Kantian thought into British philosophy. While Coleridge claimed to have read all of Kant's works by 1809, he may also have had an early exposure to Kant's system through the public lectures and reviews of F. A. Nitsch, who lectured in London in 1795.

creative, rather than passively associative, role for the operation of the faculty of sense. The violent extremities of the revolution produced critical reappraisals of the balances between reason and passion in philosophers such as Stewart and Coleridge. Paine's conception of common sense, as a kind of pragmatic and reasonable recognition of mutuality, was insufficient in accounting for the two principal causes of the Terror. The first of these causes was to be found in the character of the architects of the revolution. Robespierre and Marat were held to represent the principle of reason unchained from sentiment. The second cause was to be found in the instrumental consequences of the revolution, which were, argued its critics, enacted through the mindless and violent passion of the mob. The irony of this conjunction, of bloodless men using bloody means, was not lost on either Coleridge or Southey, who considered the tragic dimensions of the revolution in their 1794 epic poem *The Fall of Robespierre*. Beyond this, by 1809, Coleridge argued that any instrumental materialism detached from the universal moral principles of religion would culminate in new, modern, forms of Jacobinism.<sup>23</sup>

Coleridge was unable to embrace the skeptical and deistic impulses that he took to underscore Paine's writings. Nor could he endorse the abstracted and rationalist implications of the doctrines of disinterest and necessity as considered by Godwin. While he had been a youthful enthusiast of David Hartley's notions of association and necessity – once proclaiming himself to be “a complete necessitarian” – Coleridge could not accept the role that Hartley accorded the mind, that of a “lazy onlooker.” Individual moral judgment and the activity of mind were key concepts for Coleridge from his earliest writings. On Godwin's notion of disinterest Coleridge countered that benevolence depended on interest and attachment, that it was in the end “some home-born feeling, a thing of concretion” and that duty was grounded not only in reason but in volition. For this reason Coleridge's greater sympathies from 1792 to 1796 lay with Edmund Burke. His views of the revolution, as to both its political and its philosophical importance, also suggested Burke's influence. Tradition was for Coleridge not a mere catalog of prejudice and customary right; it was the collective wisdom of a natural community, its memory and common sensibility. Because of this strongly historical and indeed historicist view of human and social consciousness Coleridge was both an early enthusiast and critic of the revolution in France. While he could recall with Wordsworth that “bliss it was in that dawn to be alive,” he would also write in his addresses to the people of 1795 “that the example of

<sup>23</sup> See no. 9, October 12, 1809, *The Friend*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 4:II, ed. Barbara Rooke (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 127–8. Also January 11, 1810, *The Friend*, *Collected Works*, vol. 4:II, 283: “Despotism and Barbarism are the natural result of a national attempt to realize anti-feudalism, or the system of philosophical Jacobinism.”

France was a warning to Britain, a nation wading to their rights through blood and marking the trail of freedom with devastation.”<sup>24</sup>

### *Impact and Afterglow of the Revolution*

Most British observers viewed the revolution of 1789 as the French defeat of Bourbon absolutism in the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. Initial optimism for this early phase of the revolution welcomed what many Englishmen believed was a French adaptation of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Others believed that the revolution heralded the spread of the republicanism of the American Revolution, that it was a new version of the spirit of 1776. This view understood the revolution to represent new internationalist possibilities of a patriot French nation freed from the imperial ambition of the Bourbon dynastic imperative of universal monarchy. Political and religious freedom were linked together by constitutionalists and radicals alike as the birthright of the freeborn Englishman. The long eighteenth century had established in English political and philosophical imagination an unseverable link between antipopery and anti-Gallicanism. For many the philosophically transcendent idea of universal brotherhood had been obscured by questions of loyalty entrenched in sect and country.

The end of the French imperial menace, like the end of its ancien regime, was another promise that drew strength from the Williamite project of 1688. Yet many philosophers and poets established the optimism of the early days in terms of human rather than national possibility, rhapsodising with Wordsworth over the glorious 14th of July. It is clear then that some regarded the revolution as a novel experiment, without precedent. Burke certainly did, but he was not optimistic about the consequences of novelty or innovation. Coleridge believed the revolution to be part of a great tidal change in the affairs of men. But his first accounts were to chronicle the revolution as a tragedy. By 1795, in the aftermath of the Terror and in the third year of the war, less was said of revolution principles and more of the menace of modern Jacobinism. By 1796, despite controversy over his pension, Edmund Burke was viewed to have been a prescient seer, a man who had looked into the heart of the maelstrom and predicted the course of the storm. Others took the methods of the Jacobins, the tribunals, the uses of extraordinary powers by Robespierre and the Committee for Public Safety to have been replicated in the war cabinet of William Pitt. French Jacobins and British Tories were equally capable of employing the politics of fear and harnessing it to the dictatorship of the people in defense of the homeland.

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “An Introductory Address,” *Conciones ad Populum, Lectures on Politics and Revealed Religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, *Collected Works*, 1:2.

The longer philosophical resonance of the revolution was to provoke a nineteenth-century debate that considered human passion and will as volatile and inherently unstable entities when harnessed to political ambition and translated into revolutionary action. Utilitarians such as Bentham and Mill adopted the ideals of equality and democratic governance, but they rejected the doctrines of inalienable individual natural rights. Instead they argued that society ought to favor the maximization of communitarian interests, which might best be softened and tempered by the pleasure principle. British idealists and historicists from Coleridge to Carlyle would view the revolution as a cautionary tale, while considering the possibilities of power and passion and the spiritual dimensions of human freedom and agency through a historically mediated exercise of the will. Carlyle would consider the importance of the hero in history. Coleridge would write that the will was the preeminent part of our humanity.

Empirical utilitarians such as John Stuart Mill would consider the possibility of a "religion of humanity." But Mill, like Coleridge, would ground such an impulse in the concrete and particular, rather than universal abstract rights. For this reason Mill would consider the idea of a patriotism vested in country rather than a universal cosmopolitanism to be the better path to fellow feeling. Rational utilitarians such as Herbert Spencer and Henry Sidgwick would also argue for the patriotic impulse but distinguish the finer feeling of the love of one's countrymen from chauvinistic uses of imperialist and nationalist valorizations of the love of territory. In their accounts, sympathy and humanism are attached to concrete particulars rather than universal principles and are the active agents of a scientific historicism. British idealists such as Bernard Bosanquet and T. H. Green would offer Hegelian or Coleridgean renderings of the idealist principle but would ground them in empirical accounts of history. Were the idea of the general will a Burkean rather than a Rousseauian construction, it might have resonated with Bosanquet, who argued in *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (1899) that "sovereignty is the exercise of the General Will expressed in Law, in so far as Law is what it ought to be." Green echoed the Kantian tone of Mill's nineteenth-century Coleridgean, when he asserted that "the function of government was to maintain conditions of life in which morality shall be possible" and finally "Will, not Force, is the basis of the State."

Nineteenth-century philosophical responses to the French Revolution were complex and varied in the immediate aftermath of the event, but that event, and its meaning, continued to resonate with successive generations of Europeans as the revolution by which all subsequent revolutions must be measured. If a trend or pattern can be ascertained, it must finally be conditioned by the particular political assumptions that distinguished British from German opinion on the relationship between history and the state. For some the revolution had been the

triumph of the Enlightenment; for others it had signaled the failure of rationalism in politics. Reason and history were now inextricably and organically intertwined as interdependent principles of social, economic, and aesthetic action. Novelty and particularism became defining elements of human consciousness no less than the radical historical contexts of political agency and moral identity.

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## THE DECLINE OF NATURAL RIGHT

JEREMY WALDRON

## INTRODUCTION

In a preface he wrote in October 1894 to his book *Natural Rights: A Criticism of Some Political and Ethical Conceptions*, David G. Ritchie (sometime professor of logic and metaphysics at the University of St. Andrews) made the following observation:

When I began, some three years ago, to write a paper on "Natural Rights," . . . I had a certain fear that in criticizing that famous theory I might be occupied in slaying the already slain. Recent experience has, however, convinced me that the theory is still, in a sense, alive, or at least capable of mischief. Though disclaimed by almost all our more careful writers on politics and ethics, it yet remains a commonplace of the newspaper and the platform, not only in the United States of America, where the theory may be said to form part of the national creed, but in this country, where it was assailed a century ago by both Burke and Bentham.<sup>1</sup>

Is Ritchie correct in his claim that the theory of natural right never really died in the nineteenth century? It certainly suffered grievous injury at the end of the eighteenth century at the hands of thinkers like Edmund Burke and Jeremy Bentham. But how telling were their blows? In this chapter I shall consider what happened to the theory in the century following the attacks by Burke and Bentham.

Both of those critics – the traditional conservative and the utilitarian radical – were responding to natural right as it figured in the ideology of the French Revolution. In 1789 Edmund Burke wanted the world to know that "Englishmen at least are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire.... Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers.... In England we have not yet been completely embowelled of our natural entrails.... We have not been drawn and trussed, in order that we may be filled, like stuffed birds in a

<sup>1</sup> David G. Ritchie, *Natural Rights: A Criticism of Some Political and Ethical Conceptions* (Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1979), ix.



museum, with chaff and rags and paltry blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man.... We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms. We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility.”<sup>2</sup>

Jeremy Bentham, writing a few years later, concentrated his ire on the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*. In his notorious condemnation of natural and imprescriptible rights as “nonsense upon stilts,”<sup>3</sup> he observed that the force of any argument of natural right “is in proportion to the strength of lungs in those who use it.... I mean in the first instance: for ultimately it depends upon the sharpness of the daggers which he ... has in his pocket.”<sup>4</sup> It was the language of political violence.

When I hear of natural rights ... I always see in the background a cluster of daggers or of pikes introduced in the National Assembly with the applause of the President Condorcet for the avowed purpose of exterminating the King's friends. Of late these pikes and these daggers have been exhibited in broad day, and pointed out to reasonable and reasoning men, as gibbets used to be to murderers and thieves.<sup>5</sup>

So was it events, rather than critique, that discredited natural right? One of the things I want to do in this chapter is to consider how far the decline of natural right in the nineteenth century can be attributed to the reaction against the revolution in France, and how far it was the effect of independent streams of thought, such as positivism and historicism. I shall ask why radical thought was ambivalent about the doctrine throughout the century, and why socialist thought in particular was mostly inclined to turn its back on it. As a framework for thought, natural right suffered a radical decline in the social and political sciences. But matters were not so clear in jurisprudence, and natural right lived on to a much riper old age in the writings of some prominent economists. So we have to ask, What is it about this theory that allowed it to survive in these environments, when so much of the rest of intellectual endeavor in the nineteenth century was toxic or inhospitable to it? Finally, with Professor Ritchie, we shall ask how far American thought represents an exception to all of this, and the extent to which and the reasons for which the doctrine survived as a way of thinking in the United States, long after it had lost its credibility in political thinking elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 181–2. See Jeremy Waldron, ed., *Nonsense upon Stilts: Bentham, Burke and Marx on the Rights of Man* (London: Methuen, 1987), 114–15.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Bentham, “Anarchical Fallacies,” in Waldron, *Nonsense upon Stilts*, 53.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Bentham, “Supply Without Burthen,” in Waldron, *Nonsense upon Stilts*, 74.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Bentham, “Supply Without Burthen,” in Waldron, *Nonsense upon Stilts*.

## WHAT IS NATURAL RIGHT?

The idea of natural right, whose decline we are tracing in this chapter, is not (like the twentieth-century notion of human rights) just a list of demands that any decent polity is supposed to satisfy. No doubt any serious demand for rights is predicated on a moral argument, but the idea of natural right takes in the premises and the method of argumentation as well. Also, the theory of natural right is not just an argument that people naturally have certain rights and that, therefore, they ought to be accorded legal and political rights that correspond with them. It represents a more general orientation toward politics and society erected on certain quite abstract foundations, composed of elements of natural law jurisprudence and social contract theory and imbued with a fierce philosophical rationalism. It demands that custom and tradition justify themselves at the tribunal of reason and explain themselves in a system of thought that treats each human being as the equal of every other. As a political theory, its classic exposition may be found in the work of the late seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke, but diverse currents are also represented in the natural law jurisprudence of Hugo Grotius, in the rational egoism of Thomas Hobbes, in the essays and satires of Voltaire, in the political theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and – in somewhat different form – in the political economy of thinkers like Adam Smith.

It is almost certainly a mistake to exaggerate the coherence or unity of natural right theory, particularly in this period of its disarray. Natural right brings together a number of distinct philosophical currents, and, although in the second half of the eighteenth century its political tendency was unequivocal, by the middle of the nineteenth century – as we shall see – its shards and remnants could be adduced to support a bewildering variety of contradictory positions. Moreover, the theory of natural right in the hands of an Enlightenment philosopher is not the same as the theory of natural right in the hands of an English Chartist, a Spanish *liberal*, a Kantian jurist, a Venezuelan *libertador*, and an American defender of free enterprise. Not only were different aspects of the heritage of natural right emphasized in its different applications, but different settings required different accommodations with other values that everyone would say lay outside the ambit of natural right altogether. Still, even in this period and across all those who talked of natural right and acted on it in these different ways, certain common themes were evident.

The theory of natural right is rationalistic in its method, individualistic in its foundations, universal in its scope, and hypercritical in its politics. It draws these elements together in its regard for reason as the touchstone of individual dignity and in its refusal to countenance support for political arrangements that

denigrate the rationality or insult the dignity of the ordinary person. It is, as this formulation suggests, a fundamentally egalitarian theory, refusing to accept that there are different ranks of person (king, noble, priest), refusing indeed to recognize anything other than general utility as a ground for empowering some at the expense of others. It may not be a theory that calls for equality in the sense of economic leveling – it imagines that ordinary people, left to their own devices, may use their freedom in various ways with varying degrees of success – but it *is* committed to a fundamental leveling so far as politics is concerned. The popular sovereignty embodied in social contract theory, together with the universal suffrage that increasingly became the demand of political liberals in the nineteenth century, represent the natural tendency of this sort of egalitarianism. We are so familiar with this – at least as doctrine – that it is difficult for us to grasp how incendiary the natural equality idea seemed at the end of the eighteenth century as a premise on which to build a theory of government.

By the same token, natural right is an emancipatory theory: it regards freedom, choice, and self-determination as the natural condition of human beings and the customs and structures that hobble individual liberty as aberrations (albeit long-established and often incorrigible ones). Again the implications are incendiary. The freedom embodied in the idea of natural rights is not just the freedom to move from village to village, the right to trade freely, and the right of individuals to speak and worship as they please – though these demands seemed radical enough in their first articulation. According to most natural rights theories, people also have a right to choose whom they will be governed by and to be governed only by their own consent. Principalities and powers, hierarchies established since time immemorial, ranks of nobility, and great chains of being, all suddenly have to answer at this tribunal of self-determination. When people rose against their government, it suddenly seemed as if natural rights theory had shifted the burden of proof from rebel to ruler: it was not for the rebel to justify his impudent transgression; it was for the ruler to explain for the first time why anyone would have consented to be governed under his imperious and insolent regime.

With all this to its credit, the theory of natural rights was seen in the eighteenth century and continued to be seen in the nineteenth century as a profoundly disruptive way of thinking about politics and society. But natural right did not go into decline simply because it was politically subversive. It came to seem unsatisfactory from a philosophical point of view. It privileged the liberty and the equal rights of the individual in the most bracing way imaginable, but many thought that, both in its moral aspect and as a theory that sought to understand the world, it gave no adequate account of the main forms of human community. In the real world, community seemed to exist as something more than a voluntarily

constituted service organization for the benefit of individuals, and it seemed to call for an explanation – a historical and/or a sociological explanation using concepts that the theory of natural right could barely recognize.

The abstract universalism of natural right has always been a point of pride for proponents of the theory, a pride that continues in modern universalist doctrines of human rights. But the doctrinaire insistence that one size fits all was particularly vulnerable in an age that was beginning to become aware not just of the different trajectories followed in the way of human socialization in different parts of the world, but of a sense that different principles arise out of and are apt for different social and historical circumstances. Universalists try to hold the line against this sort of view either by denying what they take to be its implicit relativism or by insisting that even if different circumstances evoke different principles, still the explanation of *why* certain intermediate principles are appropriate for certain types of circumstance is given by a few very fundamental principles whose moral force is invariant. Maybe that is a clever philosophical maneuver. But to many historicists and sociologists in the nineteenth century, it seemed obtuse and unhelpful; it certainly did not seem to be the most fruitful heuristic for approaching social and historical diversity.

There are other problems, too, both definitional and substantial, that made it harder for the theory of natural right to defend itself. The term “natural” posed a number of difficulties. In the mid-eighteenth century, David Hume noted that the term was “commonly taken in so many senses and is of so loose a signification” that it may not really pick out any distinctive approach to justice or political right.<sup>6</sup> Theories of the natural fittingness of things – which reason can discern – are not necessarily theories of natural right. Nor are Catholic theories of natural law, which in the period under discussion was associated more with reaction than with the emancipatory politics of natural rights. The theory of natural right certainly does not include every sort of “naturalism” or “naturalistic view.”<sup>7</sup> The nineteenth century, which will be our focus, was the century in which natural science began to fulfill the promise of the Enlightenment, and this was as evident in the science of man as it was in the physical sciences. In itself natural science does not dictate a morality or a politics, but the is/ought gap did not prevent a number of naturalist social and ethical theories from claiming scientific credentials. Of these, evolutionism was one of the best known in the second half of the nineteenth century. But evolutionism, though purportedly based on nature, has

<sup>6</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, app. III, in *Hume's Enquiries*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 307.

<sup>7</sup> Not everything that G. E. Moore challenged with “the naturalistic fallacy” counts as natural right; as a matter of fact, Moore devoted very little attention to the theory of natural right in *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

at best a problematic relation to natural right, epitomized (as we shall see) in the complexities and contradictions of Herbert Spencer's philosophy.

Much the same caution has to be entertained in regard to the emphasis on rationality. Natural right theory was certainly uncompromising in its rationalism. Alexis de Tocqueville identified it with "the belief that what was wanted was to replace the complex of traditional customs governing the social order of the day by simple, elementary rules deriving from the exercise of the human reason and natural law."<sup>8</sup> But not every form of self-confident moralizing from first principles is a form of natural right. The utilitarianism of Bentham and James Mill was as rationalist and as aprioristic in its premises as the theory of natural rights – in the principle of utility, for example, and in its dogmatic and unrelenting consequentialism – but it brought reason to policy in a different way. Indeed, while some critics of natural rights, such as Edmund Burke, attacked it for its excessive rationalism, others, like Bentham, saw natural right as an attack on reason. The discourse of natural rights, said Bentham, is just "so much flat assertion," for it "lays down as a fundamental and inviolable principle whatever is in dispute."<sup>9</sup> What was needed, he thought, was a more articulate political philosophy, one that did less of the crucial work in its premises and more by the movement from a very small set of principles through complex layers of argument to carefully reasoned conclusions for law and policy. That criticism developed throughout the nineteenth century, so that by 1894, when Ritchie was writing, natural rights, which had once seemed to represent the high-water mark of the commitment to reason in human affairs, began to appear in the guise of a disreputable array of unargued intuitions.

In the same breath as the association with rationality, people from the mid-eighteenth century on would connect natural rights with atheism or at least with a freethinking assault on religion as it was traditionally conceived. From a longer historical perspective this is a little odd. The epitome of natural rights theory is John Locke's political philosophy in the second of his *Two Treatises of Government*. But a literal reading of that text reveals a philosophy that evidently rests its universal egalitarian and emancipatory principles on deep religious convictions.<sup>10</sup> Even so, the theories that built on Locke's foundation quickly acquired a reputation for looseness in their religious commitments. In 1792, Tom Paine's name was a household word for his freethinking.<sup>11</sup> And the Enlightenment *philosophes*

<sup>8</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), pt. III, chap. 1, 139.

<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Bentham, "Supply without Burthen," in Waldron, *Nonsense upon Stilts*, 74.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), II, §6, 271, and Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in John Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 121.

were widely regarded as antitheistic, if not atheistic in their metaphysics; certainly they believed that theories of natural human freedom and equality could be articulated in a way that had almost nothing to do with their own residual deism. They expected (and received) little support from the hierarchies of either Roman Catholic or established Protestant religion for their political thinking. That said, there was always an element of piety in the rhetoric of even the most anticlerical of proponents of natural right: the rights of man were often referred to as sacred, and their violation treated as sacrilege. And this was not just a *façon de parler*: natural rights theory was not fundamentally opposed to Christian ethics, for example; on the contrary, it took some certain elements of basic Christian thought, concerning the dignity and fundamental equality of all God's human creatures, much more literally and pursued their implications much less equivocally than most bishops were comfortable with.

In what follows, I shall trace some of the causes and some of the characteristics of the decline of natural right in the nineteenth century, particularly after 1815. But even here we have to be careful, and two other preliminary caveats need to be mentioned. First, our focus on the decline of this body of thought in the nineteenth century might suggest that natural right had its heyday in the eighteenth. Politically this may have been the case. But Bentham's and Burke's critiques did not come out of nowhere, and it has been suggested that the doctrine was already in some disarray in the eighteenth century, a period regarded by some as the "decadence of natural law."<sup>12</sup> Second, it is inevitable that a chapter like this, tracing the decline of natural right, will, by its design, tend to exaggerate that decline. But the decline was only partial, and the revival of a version of natural right in the mid-twentieth century was able to draw on its subterranean persistence throughout the nineteenth century and the years that followed. In tracing the causes and character of this relative decline, it will not always be possible to highlight the doctrine's persistence in various quarters. But it should not be forgotten.

## REVOLUTION AND REACTION

I said at the beginning that Bentham and Burke were responding to what they regarded as the excesses of French revolutionary theory and practice. There can be no doubt about the impact of the French Revolution and the subsequent Terror in discrediting natural right at least in the first twenty or thirty years of the nineteenth century. Natural right was an inherently subversive doctrine – challenging as it did every tradition and institution to defend itself before a tribunal of

<sup>12</sup> George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1961), 542.

reason that held each man to be the other's equal. Its natural tendency was revolutionary, and it tended to be discredited by the sanguinary reality of revolution. As George Sabine wrote, "Everywhere the Revolution produced, as revolutions are wont to do, a revulsion against its excesses, and it became the fashion to attribute these excesses to the *philosophes* and the rights of man."<sup>13</sup> Of course, not every revolution results in terror, dictatorship, and war. But the French Revolution did, and it flew the doctrine of natural right as its banner. Right or wrong, the theory of natural right was cursed with this as a part of its heritage at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

For those already inclined to conservatism, the events of 1789 to 1815 were sufficient to discredit the theory completely. Many took the opportunity to publish theories that not only rejected the doctrine of natural right but were explicit reactions against the basic humanism of its premises: I have in mind Gobineau's racism and de Maistre's repudiation of even the mildest Enlightenment optimism. But it was not just reactionaries and conservatives who abjured the theory; most of them had never adhered to it in the first place. Those of a more liberal disposition, who might have welcomed the revolution when it first broke out – "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive"<sup>14</sup> – also deserted it and the theory it was thought to embody after 1793.<sup>15</sup> The reaction might be compared to that against communism once the reality of the Soviet Union became apparent. But it was a differently shaped reaction – quicker, less ambivalent, and in some ways more intense. Even though the Terror lasted but a few years and the wars spurred by the revolution were over by 1815, the memory of Paris in 1793 and of Napoleon's profoundly disruptive war making in Europe continued to be something that could be invoked at any time to discredit natural right.

After 1815, conservatism was ascendant, but political conservatism was not the only form that threatened the natural rights idea. In the revival of traditional religion after 1815, the theory of natural right was condemned as destructively anticlerical. As historian David Thomson notes:

Many of the greatest intellects in Europe, and some of the most biting pens, devoted themselves to affirming the dogmas of Christianity and old religious beliefs. . . . The keynote of their thought was the demand for authority – authority both in state and in church, as the only bulwark against revolution and atheism. . . . Before 1800 the most influential intellectuals had been on the side of rationalism, democratic ideals, and anti-clericalism. Now . . . the greatest intellects supported traditionalism, conservatism and the church.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 670.

<sup>14</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, bk. XI (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>15</sup> See especially the chapter on Wordsworth in Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt Against the Eighteenth Century* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1929).

<sup>16</sup> David Thomson, *Europe since Napoleon*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 85.

It would be wrong to say that these conservative and reactionary currents in Europe discredited natural right altogether. As we will see, the theory continued to flourish in the United States. It was invoked also in ongoing agitation for liberation in Latin America and in Europe as late as the uprisings of 1848.<sup>17</sup> But it was plainly operating in a hostile environment, it was seldom invoked without serious qualification, and its invocation was almost always an occasion for hostility and for the expression of grave reservations about the soundness and sense of reality of those who invoked it. As the nineteenth century wore on, this political discrediting of the doctrine cleared the way for its intellectual critique and for its abandonment by many of the progressive forces to whom in other circumstances it might have continued to appeal.

#### NATURAL RIGHT IN PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

The triumph of counterrevolution was by no means comprehensive. After 1830, certainly by 1848, the nineteenth century was a century of protest and upheaval in Europe and in the Americas. Natural right was not absent from this turmoil. When the Chartists drew up their manifesto demanding universal suffrage and equal representation in London in 1837, they announced that “the universal political right of every human being is superior and stands apart from all customs, forms, or ancient usage,”<sup>18</sup> and when in 1848 a convention for women’s suffrage met at Seneca Falls, in New York, a Declaration was adopted explicitly in the mode of natural right, modeled on the 1776 Declaration of Independence, to explain why “one portion of the family of man [was now] to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied.”<sup>19</sup> Despite the sharp jab of Bentham’s pen, the 1789 Declaration of Rights “remained a charter of liberalism throughout the nineteenth century.”<sup>20</sup>

Still, there was reluctance among progressive writers to invest too heavily in what seemed a discredited vocabulary. Though specific claims of right continued to be made, in the years immediately following 1815 there tended to be a retreat to a more moderate discourse, less wide-ranging, less subversive in its implications. E. P. Thompson tells us that working-class radicals preferred to use the Burkean language of “freeborn Englishmen” and the particular virtues of English constitutionalism rather than natural rights.<sup>21</sup> Those who persisted with

<sup>17</sup> The Constitution of the French Republic declared in 1848 talks, in Article 3, of natural rights: “des droits et des devoirs antérieurs et supérieurs aux lois positives.”

<sup>18</sup> Chartist Petition agreed to at the Crown and Anchor Tavern Meeting in London, February 28, 1837, as quoted in Micheline Ishay, *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 138.

<sup>19</sup> <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/17.htm> (visited on November 3, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*, 11. See also note 16.

<sup>21</sup> See Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 77–91.



old-style natural rights theory found themselves having to apologize for its association with the Terror. One English radical wrote in 1796:

I adopt the term Jacobinism without hesitation . . . because, though I abhor the sanguinary ferocity of the late Jacobins in France, yet their principles . . . are the most consonant with my ideas of reason, and the nature of man, of any I have met with. . . . I use the term Jacobinism simply to indicate a large and comprehensive system of reform, not professing to be built upon the authorities and principles of the Gothic customary.<sup>22</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, conditions had begun to reverse in a curious way. As memory of the Terror receded, more and more people remembered natural right theory less in its “sanguinary” Rousseauian version, more in its moderate Lockean manifestation.<sup>23</sup> In that guise, the theory was associated with the virtues of the settlement of 1688, with property, and with the negative and largely formal idea of freedom from absolutism and the rule of law.<sup>24</sup> It became Whig talk, almost establishment talk. But for that very reason, many liberals and constitutionalists came to the opinion that even if it was not “terrorist language,”<sup>25</sup> Lockean natural right was no longer needed as a basis for opposition to absolutism. Other theories were available, other more straightforward ways of figuring things out. Sabine observes that “liberal political reform passed more and more out of the region of ideology and into that of institutional reconstruction,”<sup>26</sup> and for that, what was needed was not a myth about the state of nature, but a framework for clear thinking on public policy that would help shake the cobwebs from actual institutions.

In England, the utilitarians – Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and his son, John Stuart Mill – epitomized the new version of progressive political philosophy. Utilitarianism did not need the theory of natural right. It did not need to trace things back to a social contract signed at the dawn of time. Instead it proposed a systematic set of criteria for consequentialist evaluation of public and social arrangements. Natural right might have been hypercritical in its implications, but the principle of utility had its own critical logic, which “provided the sharpest of radical axes with which to chop down traditional institutions which could not answer the triumphant questions: Is it rational? Is it useful? Does it contribute to the greatest happiness of the greatest number?”<sup>27</sup> Bentham, for one, was convinced that answering these questions was only obstructed by talk of natural

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 200.

<sup>23</sup> It was only in the late twentieth century that we got a sense of John Locke’s own involvement in revolutionary agitation in the 1680s. See Peter Laslett’s “Introduction” to Locke, *Two Treatises*.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Bentham’s phrase from “Anarchical Fallacies,” in Waldron, *Nonsense upon Stilts*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 671.

<sup>27</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolutions, 1789–1848* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 236.

right. To his mind, such talk was useless for criticizing English institutions, for it participated in the very blurring of institutional fact and critical value that the traditional defense of English institutions had always counted on. Radicals needed to stop talking about rights that had a ghostly existence and talk instead about the systematic weighing of reasons for various legal and constitutional arrangements:

In proportion to the want of happiness resulting from the want of rights, a reason exists for wishing there were such things as rights. But reasons for wishing there were such things as rights, are not rights; . . . want is not supply – hunger is not bread.<sup>28</sup>

James Mill was equally merciless in puncturing the pretensions of natural right. There are persons, he said – “philosophers, pushing on their abstractions” – who say that the rights they call for already exist:

If asked, whence we derive a knowledge of this right and wrong in the abstract, which is the foundation of what they call right and wrong in the concrete, they speak dogmatically and convey no clear ideas. . . . Writers of this stamp give us to understand, that we must take this standard, like many other things which they have occasion for, upon their word.<sup>29</sup>

By simply assuming what is at issue and assuming it in abstraction from any distinctive sense of what a community owes by way of concern for its members, theorists of natural right blunt the spear of rational criticism, according to the utilitarians, and it is no wonder that the upshot of their critique is not careful evaluation followed by reform, but confusion, recrimination, and bloodshed.

This hostility to what was seen as the question-begging and obscurantist discourse of natural right continued unabated throughout the century. John Stuart Mill was a critic of some of the drier calculative aspects of Bentham’s utilitarian arithmetic, but he was never tempted by the formulas of Locke and his tradition. Seventy years after Bentham wrote his *Anarchical Fallacies*, Mill wrote in *On Liberty* that he preferred to bypass natural right and deal directly:

It is proper to state that I forego any advantage which could be derived to my argument from the idea of abstract right as a thing independent of utility. I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.<sup>30</sup>

One could phrase the conclusions of an argument like that of *On Liberty* in the language of rights, but as I said at the beginning of Section 2, the theory of natural

<sup>28</sup> Bentham, “Anarchical Fallacies,” in Waldron, *Nonsense upon Stilts*, 53.

<sup>29</sup> James Mill, “Jurisprudence,” in *James Mill: Political Writings*, ed. Terence Ball (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 46.

<sup>30</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Currin V. Shields (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 14.

right was about premises, not just conclusions.<sup>31</sup> Mill wanted to make it clear that he did not need natural right premises even for what appeared to be an argument for individual rights. The very considerable success of the utilitarians in pursuing a sometimes quite radical agenda in this form helped reinforce the impression among progressive thinkers that natural right was not only a dangerous associate, but an unnecessary one.

European socialists were also reluctant to invest in the theory. It is easy enough to explain this for certain circles, by the growth of anti-individualist versions of socialism – for example, in the work of Karl Marx. For Marx, the only thing salvageable from the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* was the rights of the citizen, precisely the part of the manifesto that was *not* tainted by natural right: as for the rest, “none of the so-called rights of man goes beyond egoistic man, man as he is in civil society, namely an individual withdrawn behind his private interests and whims and separated from the community.”<sup>32</sup> Natural right could not conceive of man as Marx conceived of him, as a species-being, engaged in the communal organization and use of socially productive forces.

But actually, Marx’s philosophically collectivist version of socialism was far from the only version on offer. Eric Hobsbawm points out that at least in the early decades of the nineteenth century the new society that socialist agitators envisaged did not necessarily abandon liberal ideals:

A world in which all were happy, and every individual fully and freely realized his or her potentialities, in which freedom reigned and government that was coercion had disappeared, was the ultimate aim of both liberals and socialists.<sup>33</sup>

Still, like Mill, even the socialists who shared liberal ideals had little time for natural right as a starting point. For them, the reason was not the sanguinary provocations of Rousseau, though that was always a strategic disadvantage. It was an almost opposite danger: in matters economic, the theory of natural right in its moderate Lockean version tended to be associated with the protection of property and with the formal characteristics of the rule of law. Socialists wanted to expose the reality of inequality and exploitation that formal right tended to mask and that substantial natural right in its proprietorial version tried to legitimize. If pressed, they may have accepted that these proprietorial conclusions distorted the truth of natural right. They even may have accepted that someone could phrase their position in the idiom of natural right and do so without making a mockery

<sup>31</sup> See also the excellent discussion of H. L. A. Hart, “Natural Rights: Bentham and John Stuart Mill,” in *Essays on Bentham: Jurisprudence and Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 90.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in Waldron, *Nonsense upon Stilts*, 147.

<sup>33</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolutions*, 243.

of that idiom. But they felt no necessity to do this. Like the utilitarians, they believed that their affirmative claims should be made directly, without having to be phrased in the idiom of a less disingenuous understanding of natural right.

Something similar was true of radical democrats. In principle, the demand for democracy could be phrased in terms of natural right. Democracy is a credible expression of fundamental equality and of respect for individual thought and liberty in the circumstances of collective decision. Even the principle of majoritarianism can be unpacked in terms of natural right: each has a right that his own voice count as strongly as possible in the public policy direction that it argues for, but only as much as anyone else's, and he has a right that no policy position be favored collectively on any basis other than this equal respect.<sup>34</sup> And sometimes the case for universal suffrage *was* made in these terms in the nineteenth century: I have already mentioned the Chartists.<sup>35</sup> But the case was also made more directly by the utilitarians, eschewing the premises of natural right.<sup>36</sup> And as the century wore on, natural right switched sides. It started being associated with the *antidemocratic* position – with the new talk of “tyranny of the majority” and the democratic threat to individual rights (particularly property rights).<sup>37</sup> Now it was natural rights against Rousseau, rather than a rights-based argument for democracy.

Democracy was often associated with nationalist demands, but there, too, the doctrine of natural right was pushed to one side. I have already noted the universalism of natural right: not only did it attribute the same rights to everyone, but it seemed an inherently cosmopolitan and internationalist idea. Some of the more hopeful features of the outbreak of the French Revolution had that internationalist character.<sup>38</sup> But though the revolution was universalist in tone, the actions of France became more nationalistic and aggressive in the 1790s. This was partly

<sup>34</sup> For a modern argument to the effect that the principle of majority decision uniquely satisfies these constraints of neutrality, equality, and positive valence, see Kenneth May, “A Set of Independent Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Simple Majority Decision,” *Econometrica* 20 (1952): 680.

<sup>35</sup> See quote accompanying note 18.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., James Mill, “Government,” in *Political Writings*, ed. Ball, vol. 3, especially 21–42.

<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note John Stuart Mill's observation in 1840 that popularization of the phrase “the tyranny of the majority” was one of the few deplorable effects of Alexis de Tocqueville's work, *Democracy in America*. See John Stuart Mill, “M. de Tocqueville on Democracy in America” (1840), in Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical* (New York: Henry Holt, 1882), 2:81.

<sup>38</sup> David Thomson points out in *Europe Since Napoleon* (29) that the heroes of 1789 in France felt that “they were conducting a revolution on behalf of all mankind” and “welcomed into their ranks men of any other nation whom they regarded as sharing their aspiration.” In the first flush of revolutionary enthusiasm, Tom Paine and Jeremy Bentham were made citizens of France, and when Lafayette gave the key of the Bastille to Paine to deliver to George Washington, the gesture in its identification of the French and American Revolutions was “a symbolic gesture of the solidarity of the democratic international.”

because of France's strategic situation. But it also reflected an ambiguity that was present certainly in Rousseau's thought and arguably in all versions of natural right that emphasized popular sovereignty.<sup>39</sup> As we have seen, the emancipatory rhetoric of natural right aimed not just at liberating the individual, but at liberating communities of individuals to govern themselves by their own collective will. Looked at from a strictly individual point of view, the principle of self-determination might privilege personal freedom and government by consent. But in terms of practical politics, self-determination was always going to be seen as a collective matter – as a matter of what peoples, not persons, were entitled to. On this logic, it was not the individual who was entitled to rule himself; instead the will and destiny of the people were held to be something in whose name the individual could rightly be subjected. For many nineteenth-century patriots, *the people* was a real entity – as real as the individuals who composed it – with a history and an interest of its own. The Jacobins regarded the sovereign will of the French people as sacred, and in their progress through Europe the French taught other peoples – the Italians, the Spaniards, and so on – by example (if not necessarily by intent) to accord sanctity also to their own *volontés generales*.

Now, nationalistic versions of popular sovereignty were not seen in the same antiliberal light in the nineteenth century as they were in the twentieth. Some of them were versions of liberalism: to read Mazzini, for example, is to read a focused application of liberal principles about self-determination to the specific circumstances of Italy. But they were not versions of liberalism to which traditional natural right theory had any distinctive contribution to make. As I have said, the main difficulty emerged with the idea of “the people.” From the point of view of natural right, “the people” was just the plural of the individual person; it was not analyzed as a collective and barely understood as a sovereign. Rousseau was closer than most theorists of natural right to a collective sense of “the people,” but it was just at this point that his own theory began to exhibit the antinomies most associated with the abuses of the 1790s. Rousseau stated the collectivist position too starkly: “Whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free.”<sup>40</sup> By itself the language of positive freedom was too austere. European nationalists such as Herder, Fichte, and Schelling preferred to associate it with the richer discourse of a people's cultural and linguistic heritage, and their immemorial history as brothers, as inhabitants of the same villages and tillers of the same soil. That would be a “people” worth subordinating the individual to,

<sup>39</sup> Thomson, *Europe since Napoleon*, 30–1.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), bk. I, chap. 7, 64.

but it was not a sense of “the people” that natural right could comprehend. What happened, then, as the nineteenth century wore on, was that the theory of natural right was simply marginalized in nationalist discourse or superseded by thicker theories of popular emancipation. Natural right seemed thin, quaint, and irrelevant by comparison, and it remained so until the twentieth century, when people understood the need to revive it as a basis of the moral and legal claims that an individual might make against the people whose communal existence allegedly enveloped him.

#### NEW INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS

The nineteenth century was an age of great intellectual innovation as well as political upheaval. But few of the new currents of thought were congenial to natural rights theory. There is not enough space to consider all of these: some we have touched on already; some we shall postpone to our later discussions of natural right in economics, natural right in jurisprudence, and the distinctive career of natural right in the United States. But it is clear that natural right was never going to sit comfortably in an intellectual environment polarized by romanticism, on the one hand, and materialist positivism, on the other. Both these developments responded in different ways – poetically or technically – to the emergence of a new social and material environment: the rise of mass society, industrial society, and the need for a political science oriented to technical issues of administration as much as to the traditional forms and problems of governance. Natural right seemed as irrelevant to the enthusiasm with which positivists, such as Auguste Comte, conceived a new science of society and administration as to the fury and despair with which romantic and idealist literature reacted to the soullessness of modern industry. Even those critics of modernity, like Thomas Carlyle, who were explicitly reactionary in their nostalgia looked back wistfully to ancient visions of community and heroism, not to the modest premises of Lockean individualism.

I have said several times that the theory of natural right was universalistic in its basic principles. It invited its adherents to think about the development of political institutions in terms of a single trajectory of state of nature, social contract, and civil society. Of course, it was always understood that this trajectory was simplistic in relation to the actual history of particular societies, but it was thought nevertheless to supply a useful template that could be placed over an account of the historical or anthropological detail of actual history as an aid to interpreting its moral significance.<sup>41</sup> But this balancing act could be taken only

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of this in relation to Locke’s political theory, see Jeremy Waldron, “John Locke: Social Contract versus Political Anthropology,” *Review of Politics* 51 (1989): 3.

so far. Montesquieu's *Esprit de Lois* gave the eighteenth century a taste of how productive a political science could be if it abandoned this assumption that, ultimately, one size fits all, and the success of his geographical and cultural relativism sounded an ominous note for the future of natural right.<sup>42</sup> The growth of more sophisticated historicist philosophies in the nineteenth century meant that the unsatisfactory character of the natural rights view became patent.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, many intellectuals were venturing the opinion that the purpose of rational analysis

is not to criticize the institutions, laws, and traditions of society, but to understand how they arose, to grasp them as the product of their unique historical circumstances. To criticize society according to some general normative ideals was now regarded as pointless, because it abstracts from the factors that make a society what it is *of necessity*.<sup>43</sup>

Worse still, the historicist approach was able to reflect on the provenance of the ideals of natural right themselves: "The apparently universal, natural or eternal standards of reason of the *Aufklärung* are ultimately only the product of their own era and culture."<sup>44</sup> At a stretch, the rights of the individual might still be regarded as important, but only as an emanation of local conditions. Here the themes of nationalism and historicism joined in a sort of vindication of Edmund Burke: "The historic method which grew in favor in history and in politics admitted that rights were founded in nature but identified nature with history and affirmed that the institutions of any nation were properly but an expression of the life of the people."<sup>45</sup>

When critics attacked the timeless verities of natural right, some (as we have seen) emphasized relativity to place, climate, and circumstance. Others speculated about a process of organic growth that might manifest itself at different stages in different climes but nevertheless had a consistent overall trajectory. The philosophy of Hegel was of this character. The world went through its various stages, and the idea of abstract freedom entered history and took hold, no doubt initially at one particular place and time but in a way that was relevant for all times. But abstract freedom was not immune from dialectics; it, too, was destined to supersession by more authentic modes of human life, involving the

<sup>42</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), eds. Anne Cohler, Basia Miller, and Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>43</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Grove Haines, *The Revival of Natural Law Concepts: A Study of the Establishment and of the Interpretation of Limits on Legislatures with Special Reference to the Development of Certain Phases of American Constitutional Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), 69.

identity of strong particularized ethical communities. In the course of outlining his dialectic, Hegel took the opportunity to say some very harsh things about natural right – its empty abstraction, its betrayal of all that is generous in human nature and enriched by community, its contradictions, and again the bloodshed that its fanatic pursuit made inevitable. This was the familiar conservative critique of the revolution and Terror, now rendered as idealist philosophy.<sup>46</sup> Equally important was Hegel's explicit relativization of natural right to a particular set of historical circumstances, and that, of course, was fatal to its pretensions: natural right itself extolled reason, but it could not afford too much in the way of reflection on its own character and emergence. Hegel's theory provided a self-conscious philosophy of the decline of natural right: it was a way not just to condemn it to irrelevance, but to comprehend its eventual (and inevitable) decline.

Having said all that, we should be careful about how much direct influence we attribute to Hegel, particularly as the nineteenth century progressed. The celebrity of his work was largely a matter of fashion, and Hegel was unfashionable in Germany by midcentury. Still, his philosophy exercised considerable influence, first on the more materialistic dialectic of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and later also on a generation of "new" liberals, including liberals in England, such as T. H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet. Their Hegelianism may have been weak and tempered with some rather down-to-earth British ideas of urban politics and ordinary social and political responsibility. But they agreed with Hegel that theories of natural right could no longer be regarded as a starting point. Natural right represented a discredited intellectual tendency to be diagnosed and understood, not a set of premises with which to begin. Even if it is important to preserve certain individualist values and to say – as Green said – that the state presupposes the rights of individuals, it was equally important to emphasize that "a right against society, as such, is an impossibility," for rights are features of our organic relationship in community.<sup>47</sup> A proper approach to politics and society needs to establish organic interdependence on the ground floor, so to speak, rather than seeing it as an option that free and equal individuals, proud and independent of one another, might or might not choose to exercise.

<sup>46</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §§541–95; *Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science* (Heidelberg, 1817–18), trans. J. M. Stewart and P. C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975).

<sup>47</sup> T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (London: Longmans Green, 1941), 144–6.



## LAW

I have talked thus far about the decline of natural right as a theory of society and as an inspiration for political action. However, the doctrine of natural right was always legalistic. It used the language of the law – rights, duties, and contract – and it licensed a sort of litigious stance of the individual toward the community. So it makes sense to look particularly at the influence of natural right in the field of jurisprudence. And here we begin to hear the other side of the story, that what the nineteenth century witnessed was by no means a comprehensive decline of natural right on every front.

Natural right is not the same as natural law, but it grew out of the natural law heritage in the seventeenth century. To a certain extent, then, its fate was tied to the career of natural law. It has been said that natural law was “in hibernation” in the nineteenth century except within the Catholic Church.<sup>48</sup> This is an exaggeration. It is true that in England and in the places where English jurisprudence was influential, natural law was discredited. Bentham rejected even the muddled compromise with natural law that Blackstone sought to salvage.<sup>49</sup> And Austinian positivism, following in Bentham’s footsteps, built an influential jurisprudence – completely serviceable for the purposes of the working lawyer and more than adequate from the perspective of the lawmaker – that had no need whatever of that concept.<sup>50</sup> But the same was not necessarily true in the rest of Europe, and the continuing influence of natural law in nineteenth-century Continental jurisprudence, long after it had become marginalized to the point of nonexistence in philosophy and sociology, meant there was at least a modicum of space for the sort of thinking that the doctrine of natural right presupposed.<sup>51</sup>

In their more abstract reaches, German jurisprudence and German constitutionalism were heavily influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant himself cannot really be regarded as a theorist of natural law: his derivation of duty from the formal structure of practical reason differs markedly from the more substantive natural law arguments of the likes of Locke and Grotius. But Kant’s vocabulary of duty and right, and his distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives, is not uncongenial to the tradition of natural right; nor are the shape and spirit of his jurisprudence. “The kingdom of ends,” whether

<sup>48</sup> J. M. Kelly, *A Short History of Western Legal Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 333.

<sup>49</sup> See Jeremy Bentham, *A Comment on the Commentaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 60–73.

<sup>50</sup> See John Austin, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. R. Campbell, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: John Murray, 1885); see also A. V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, 8th ed. of 1915 (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982).

<sup>51</sup> Haines, *Revival of Natural Law Concepts*, 65: “Various schools of legal philosophy continued to be protagonists of natural law theories when in political circles these theories were regarded as exploded vagaries.”

posited as a heuristic for moral thinking or as an ideal of political philosophy, gave an attractive rendering of traditional liberal ideals, combining them with a Rousseauian reverence for at least the idea of legislative participation. The whole of Kantian legal and political philosophy was built on principles of respect for freedom, dignity, and equality, which could serve as an uncompromising touchstone for the legitimacy of any system of law:

*The Universal Principle of Right:* Any action is right if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law.<sup>52</sup>

If a public law is so constituted that a whole people could not possibly give its consent to it (as, e.g., that a certain class of subjects should have the hereditary privilege of ruling rank), it is unjust.<sup>53</sup>

Though these principles are redolent of the social contract tradition, Kant found a basis for them that did not depend on the mythmaking of natural right. (His use of the social contract ideal was always hypothetical, deployed explicitly as an ideal of reason.) He argued that the principles I have cited were disclosed by rigorous reflection on the very possibility of practical reason in the realm of the governance of men's external actions. What is more, he did not just propose them as external criteria of legitimacy; he saw them as the key to legal science. The Universal Principle of Right, in particular, opened up the possibility of something like an algebraic science of right that could be used, *within* jurisprudence, to build up a rational code of laws in the Romanist spirit and sort out and analyze some of the conundrums of property law or the law of obligations with which lawyers had to grapple every day.<sup>54</sup>

The same was true of constitutional jurisprudence. Kant's legal and political theory seemed to offer a systematic way of understanding the idea of a *Rechtsstaat*, a society whose political structure was thoroughly imbued with the rule of law. His achievement was not so much the redemption of natural right in this area as the provision of a rigorous intellectual framework in which some of the most important insights of natural right – limited government, legal equality, the primacy of individual autonomy, and the symmetry of right and duty – could continue to be pursued.<sup>55</sup> In Germany, then, it was legal much more than political

<sup>52</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Introduction to the Doctrine of Right," §C, from *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 387.

<sup>53</sup> Immanuel Kant, "On the Common Saying: 'That may be Correct in Theory, but it is of no Use in Practice,'" in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, 297.

<sup>54</sup> In this as in much else, Kant was bearing the mantle of Leibniz: see Roger Berkowitz, *The Gift of Science: Leibniz and the Modern Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Michael Stolleis, *Public Law in Germany, 1800–1914* (New York: Bergahn, 2001), 9: "The numerous Kantian systems of natural law, which grew up between 1790 and 1810, had already imported parts of the modern vocabulary of constitutional thought into the older natural law

philosophy that kept old-fashioned liberal ideals alive.<sup>56</sup> This was partly a matter of resisting the reaction against natural right by singling out elements of the tradition that had distorted it. The French revolutionaries, it was said, had gone wrong by preferring the general will of Rousseau to the classic premises of individual liberty. “The French,” wrote Heinrich von Treitschke, “despite all their enthusiasm for liberty, have only experienced equality,” and what is more, they tended to associate their equality, in Rousseauian fashion, with statism, whereas von Treitschke accompanied his doctrine of liberty with a fairly thoroughgoing suspicion of the state.<sup>57</sup>

Having said all that, these ways of pursuing the jurisprudence of natural right were never unopposed. The same currents of thought that set up nationalist conceptions against old-fashioned liberal ones affected legal theory, too. Friedrich Carl von Savigny insisted that law was not to be regarded as the working out of an abstract calculus of liberty, but as a historical emanation of the spirit of a people, as much a part of a nation’s particular heritage as its language or its culture.<sup>58</sup> There had long been a current of jurisprudence that associated law with custom rather than with reason, and the nationalist mood of the 1800s gave this view more force. As Benjamin Cardozo remarked, “The nineteenth century put its faith in unconscious and undirected growth; and Nature dethroned as an exemplar, was made to yield place to History.”<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, as the century advanced, both the rationalism of Kantian *Recht* and the immanent nationalism of Savigny’s historical jurisprudence came under attack from a vigorous new positivism. In the 1870s, Rudolf von Jhering and others tried to develop a more realistic legal theory, understanding law as founded on will and purpose, not on either natural right or cultural ideals. Law for Jhering was an instrument for the explicit pursuit of social interests.<sup>60</sup> As such it was amenable to evaluation in the light of social utility, not natural right. Jhering is famous for having attacked a jurisprudence of concepts – what we would call “legal formalism” – and there is a tremendous amount in common between his legal philosophy and that of the American realists, on the one hand, and modern

systems.” E. K. Bramstead and K. J. Melhuish, eds., *Western Liberalism: A History in Documents from Locke to Croce* (London: Longman, 1978).

<sup>56</sup> Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 672.

<sup>57</sup> Heinrich von Trietschke, “Political Freedom and Its Limitation,” 449.

<sup>58</sup> Friedrich Karl Savigny, *Of the Vocation of Our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence* (Birmingham, Ala.: Legal Classics Library, 1986), 24–31. See also the excellent discussion in Donald R. Kelley, *The Human Measure: Social Thought in the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 229–51.

<sup>59</sup> Benjamin Cardozo, Review of Roscoe Pound, *Interpretations of Legal History*, *Harvard Law Review* 37 (1924): 280.

<sup>60</sup> See Rudolf von Ihering, *Law as a Means to an End*, trans. Isaak Husik (Boston: Boston Book Co., 1913).

sociological jurisprudence, on the other.<sup>61</sup> But what matters most for our purposes is that Jhering's work represented a decisive turn in German jurisprudence away from any lingering preoccupation with abstract formulas of right.

## ECONOMICS

The other arena in which natural right seemed more robust in the nineteenth century was in the sphere of economic thought. There are several possible reasons for this. One is the style of economic thought, which is almost as abstract in its foundations as natural right. It is certainly as individualistic. Eric Hobsbawm points out that "the classical assumptions about the nature and natural state of man undoubtedly fitted the special situation of the market much better than the situation of humanity in general."<sup>62</sup> Another reason is that, just like natural right, economic theory does not assume that there is a state and that its familiar institutions or the traditional areas of its operation are justified: it calls all that into question or at any rate refuses to take it for granted. Neither economic theory nor the theory of natural right need be "anarchist" in its implications or even what we would now call "libertarian," but both bodies of thought proceed with a strong presumption in favor of individual liberty, and they insist that legal and political restraints need to be argued for, not assumed.

Third, in economics perhaps more than anywhere else, the theory of natural right was able to display its chameleonlike character.<sup>63</sup> It could be used to defend economic liberty against government attempts to redress inequality, or it could be used to condemn existing inequalities of social conditions and to argue for a natural right to subsistence for the poor.<sup>64</sup> Historically, natural right had been associated with private ownership and the protection of property against social claims. But its tendency was never unequivocal: in the nineteenth century, Locke's labor theory was cited often to defend the rights of workers against the farmers or industrialists who employed them.<sup>65</sup> Ritchie noted that Henry George made his case against the private ownership of land on grounds of natural right, though "he works out this vague and treacherous conception in his own way."<sup>66</sup> In other

<sup>61</sup> See H. L. A. Hart, "Jhering's Heaven of Concepts and Modern Analytical Jurisprudence," *Essays in Jurisprudence and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 265.

<sup>62</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolutions*, 237. Hobsbawm also suggests that since there was greater confidence in the triumph of capitalism than in the stability of political arrangements, it was not thought particularly dangerous or incendiary to license natural law speculation about the economy.

<sup>63</sup> Ritchie, *Natural Rights*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Henry W. Farnam, "The State and the Poor," *Political Science Quarterly* 3 (1888): 282.

<sup>65</sup> See John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the "Two Treatises of Government"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 6.

<sup>66</sup> D. G. Ritchie, Review of Henry George, *The Condition of Labor: An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII*, *International Journal of Ethics* 2 (1892): 522.

words, natural right had no settled tendency one way or another, and the fact that economics as a discipline also tended to argue from first principles meant that there was a genuine inclination on both sides to explore and debate what various premises of natural right might actually entail so far as property and markets were concerned.<sup>67</sup>

On the other hand, there were economists who did not share their colleagues' predilection for argument from first principles, in the style of natural rights. Some emphasized the difference between arguing in the style of Hume and Smith and arguing in the style of Locke and Rousseau. Certainly, the economic liberalism that derived from Smith's work is quite different from anything one can find in Locke, both in its foundations and in what it implied for free trade and other aspects of national economic policy. It is actually quite hard to put one's finger on this. The premises of Smith's and Hume's political economy are still very abstract, but it is as though their abstraction is more pragmatic in character than Locke's theology of individual rights.

Beyond all this, many economists took the view that natural rights talk in economics was not only inconclusive but fundamentally confused, and they ridiculed "the natural-rights dogma that property rests on production."<sup>68</sup> Their arguments instead were pragmatic through and through. One American economist dismissed arguments for free trade based on natural rights along the following lines:

A few years ago, my esteemed friend Professor Sumner, of Yale University, announced that he had talked enough . . . about protectionism as a matter of policy; hereafter he purposed to attack it as immoral, – as an unjustifiable invasion of natural rights. . . . I do not deem myself qualified to say much about natural rights, having never lived in a state of nature, but having resided all my life in communities, more or less civilized, whose citizens were required to render numerous and onerous services, to refrain from many courses agreeable to themselves, to make heavy contributions, to submit to severe sacrifices, to walk in paths instead of roaming at will over the fields, – all for the general good. It seems to me that the denunciation of protectionism as immoral should be preceded by a demonstration that it is socially inexpedient. . . . If the denial of the right to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest market would yield to the community any considerable part of the blessings which the protectionists, unquestionably in good faith, promise, I imagine there are few Americans so transcendental in their political philosophy as to question the right or the propriety of the establishment of that system.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> We see this continuing through the late twentieth century in the debate about the economic implications of Lockean premises in the work of Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

<sup>68</sup> Thorstein Veblen, "Mr. Cummings's Strictures on *The Theory of the Leisure Class*," *Journal of Political Economy* 8 (1899): 111.

<sup>69</sup> Francis A. Walker, "Protection and Protectionists," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 4 (1890): 264.

The antinomies of natural right in matters of economy were supposed to be particularly evident in the work of Herbert Spencer.<sup>70</sup> His *Social Statics*, first published in 1851, proceeded on unambiguous principles of natural right – principles of natural liberty and an equal God-given entitlement to exercise liberty for the sake of self-preservation and the pursuit of happiness that (but for their prolixity) might have been formulated by John Locke.<sup>71</sup> Much of *Social Statics* pursued the economic and political implications of these principles in a familiar spirit of laissez-faire. But Spencer also associated this Lockean position with a different sort of naturalism, with something closer to Darwinism – the idea of a struggle for life, the evolution of society, and “the survival of the fittest.” And it was simply not clear how the two strands of thought could be reconciled. A Lockean principle of liberty does not license the sort of life-or-death struggle in which one could talk comfortably about the survival of the fittest, and (as George Sabine observes) Spencer was bound to have difficulty maintaining the idea of a minimal laissez-faire state on the assumption of an evolutionism that one would think “would make the state, like society, grow into something more complex and more highly integrated.”<sup>72</sup> These antinomies only intensified as Spencer’s career developed. The evolutionism played a larger and larger role in his theory, and it contributed to the impression – pretty strongly established in any case – that appeals to the natural or to natural rights could not really settle anything in political economy.

#### NATURAL RIGHT IN THE UNITED STATES

I have reserved the final section of this chapter for some comments on America, for the picture of a largely unmitigated decline of natural right, which seems to be the upshot of any general study of nineteenth-century philosophy and politics, is in need of even greater qualification when we turn our attention to the United States.

The United States could claim to be the child of natural right. The 1776 Declaration of Independence opened with a resounding proclamation:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, – That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its

<sup>70</sup> Spencer was probably the primary target of the critique of natural right in the book by D. G. Ritchie quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>71</sup> See Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1868), 93–4.

<sup>72</sup> Sabine, *History of Political Theory*, 724.

foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

This can be read as a paradigm of natural right rhetoric (Lockean in character, uncontaminated by Rousseau). Maybe it is a little naïve to say that the U.S. Constitution, with its republican structure, its separation of powers, and its Bill of Rights, is the realization of Locke in Philadelphia. There are aspects of the Federalists' jealous preservation of central authority that are based on pragmatic political realism rather than the first principles of natural right theory. And there are other aspects of American constitutionalism that are simply homegrown and owe no debt to the natural right tradition. Civic republicans may want to point to the influence of a heritage of political theory thought that is distinct from natural right.<sup>73</sup> And there are aspects of the Framers' version of natural rights theory – such as the Ninth Amendment to the Constitution – that quickly became a dead letter in the U.S. law and governance.<sup>74</sup> Even so, a case can be made that natural right had more to do with this constitutional design and with the spirit in which it began to be administered than any other body of contemporary theory.

It is tempting to add to this that the growth of the practice of judicial review of legislation based on individual rights also represented the continuing influence of natural right in the life of the American Constitution. But that would be misleading. Though judicial review was inaugurated in the decision in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803), its use for most of the nineteenth century was structural rather than rights-based. Only toward the very end of the century was there any attempt on the part of the judiciary to uphold principles of natural right enshrined in the Constitution. That involved invoking principles of freedom of contract, laissez faire, and the protection of property to strike down economic and social legislation, and it was intensely controversial for many of the reasons that natural right itself was controversial.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> See the discussion in Frank Michelman, "Traces of Self-Government," *Harvard Law Review* 100 (1986): 17–19.

<sup>74</sup> The Ninth Amendment reads: "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people."

<sup>75</sup> Consider the well-known dissent by Justice Holmes in *Lochner v. New York* 198 U.S. 45 (1905): 75: "This case is decided upon an economic theory which a large part of the country does not entertain. . . . It is settled by various decisions of this court that state constitutions and state laws may regulate life in many ways which we as legislators might think as injudicious, or if you like as tyrannical, as this, and which, equally with this, interfere with the liberty to contract. . . . The liberty of the citizen to do as he likes so long as he does not interfere with the liberty of others to do the same, which has been a shibboleth for some well-known writers, is interfered with by school laws, by the Post Office, by every state or municipal institution which takes his money for purposes thought desirable, whether he likes it or not. The 14th Amendment does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*."

True, even in the United States, there was a conservative reaction against natural rights ideas after 1815, though it was less comprehensive there than elsewhere.<sup>76</sup> And American theorists of natural right could certainly be embarrassed intellectually in the same ways as their European counterparts. In certain jurisprudential circles in the United States, toward end of the nineteenth century, it was regarded as an absurd mistake in a legal treatise to talk of natural right.<sup>77</sup> And much the same was true among American sociologists and political scientists, certainly by the 1860s.<sup>78</sup> It was also true of progressives. The growth of pragmatism as a self-conscious body of philosophical writing was an American phenomenon, and in the latter part of the nineteenth century pragmatists excoriated the apriorisms of natural rights theory along with every other metaphysics. Like the philosophic radicals in England, they wanted their progressive ideas stated in a direct and transparent form, without any metaphysical claptrap.

Even so, the tenor of the Constitution, a strong individualist sense of "We, the People ...," the spirit of the frontier, and the innate American suspicion of government conspired to provide a more hospitable environment for natural right for much longer than Europe provided. For example, there was a greater influence of contractarian ideals in the United States, and not just among political philosophers.<sup>79</sup> As one observer has remarked, "in America men put the social-contract theory into practice and actually made their government.... They identified with it and felt that they should share, as of right, in the advantages that it could bring them."<sup>80</sup> Participants in constitutional conventions in Virginia in 1829 and in Massachusetts in 1820 and 1853 spoke the language of inalienable rights and argued about property and representation in language worthy of Locke, with no particular sense that this needed to be filtered through the lens of Kant, Comte, Bentham, or any other respectable oracle of nineteenth-century thought.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Haines, *Revival of Natural Law Concepts*, 65: "When the reaction from the practices and the political philosophy of the American and the French Revolutions gained ascendancy in the United States one of the chief objectives was to discredit Thomas Jefferson and the tenets of the Declaration of Independence."

<sup>77</sup> See, e.g., the review (by "F. J. G.") of Christopher G. Tiedeman, *A Treatise on the Limitations of Police Power in the United States*, *Political Science Quarterly* 2 (1887): 175.

<sup>78</sup> See Benjamin Fletcher Wright, *American Interpretations of Natural Law: A Study in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931), 276.

<sup>79</sup> See Alan Ryan, "The British, the Americans and Rights," in *A Culture of Rights: The Bill of Rights in Philosophy, Politics, and Law, 1791 and 1991*, eds. Michael J. Lacey and Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 380.

<sup>80</sup> Leonard W. Levy, "The Law of the Commonwealth and Chief Justice Shaw," in *American Law and the Constitutional Order: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Lawrence M. Friedman and Harry N. Scheiber, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 152.

<sup>81</sup> Wright, *American Interpretations of Natural Law*, 194–210.



In midcentury, the doctrine of natural right took on new salience in two regards. I have already mentioned the Seneca Falls Declaration of 1848, in which women's demands for social equality and political suffrage were put forward with an explicit invocation of natural right. The other regard is, of course, the politics of slavery.<sup>82</sup> In the very nature of the problem, discussion of the justifiability of slavery is impossible without going back to first premises about human freedom and equality. There were natural law defenses of slavery in the sixteenth century, and one sees the residue of them even in Locke.<sup>83</sup> Most observers would have said, however, that the issue was settled as a matter of natural law by the middle of the eighteenth century, at the latest: slavery was repugnant to natural law and utterly incompatible with the rights of man.<sup>84</sup> But in the period between 1831 and 1865, the issue was revisited in a number of tracts published in the American South that took on the issue of the natural justifiability of slavery directly. Now, it would be a mistake to say that the outpouring of books and essays that denounced slavery as a violation of natural right was a direct response to these racist tracts. Most abolitionists saw no need to dignify these arguments with a response. Instead, antislavery arguments based on natural right were intended to demonstrate the intolerability, as well as the wrongness, of slavery: the case that American theorists of natural right sought to answer was the case that said that even if slavery was a violation of the law of nature, it must be tolerated as positive law for the time being and, through the Fugitive Slave Laws, accepted as a social and political expedient. To answer this case, the abolitionists needed to invoke not just natural law premises, but the whole natural right theory of government.<sup>85</sup> Readers do not need to be told that this was not a purely academic debate. Though the huge convulsion that we call the American Civil War was fought ostensibly just on the issue of union and secession, the underlying issue of slavery emancipation was inescapable, and the compatibility of slavery with the contract underlying a free republic was the issue for which men fought: hundreds of thousands of lives were sacrificed to determine a most basic issue in the natural rights of man.

<sup>82</sup> We think of this as an issue particularly for the United States, and mostly it was. But we should not forget the hemispheric politics of slavery. Action against slavery in the nineteenth century was not confined to North America. The prohibition of the slave trade in the British Empire earlier in the century reflected the continued force of natural rights arguments among the liberal intelligentsia of Britain. And in different ways, the slave revolt in Haiti and the emancipatory policies pursued by Simón Bolívar and other *libertadores* in Latin America – all this kept the issue of the fundamental rights of man on the front burner.

<sup>83</sup> See Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 49, 53–4; and Locke, *Two Treatises*, II, §§22–4, 172: 283–5, 382–3.

<sup>84</sup> See Robert M. Cover, *Justice Accused: Antislavery and the Judicial Process* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), 8–30.

<sup>85</sup> There is a fine discussion of all this in Wright, *American Interpretations of Natural Law*, 210–42.

## CONCLUSION

The period roughly between 1789 and 1945 is a most interesting one from the point of view of natural right. We know that the doctrine flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that people gave their lives for it, and in its name demolished their traditional forms of government. We know that something like it – the doctrine of human rights and new forms of social contract theory – flourished again in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>86</sup> In between there was a period of decline and hibernation – uneven, to be sure, and never complete – but a period in which to invoke natural right was always to invite intellectual ridicule and accusations of political irresponsibility. As late as 1951, Hannah Arendt could write disparagingly of the various societies formed for the protection of the rights of man in the first part of the twentieth century:

All attempts to arrive at a new bill of human rights were sponsored by marginal figures – by a few international jurists without political experience or professional philanthropists supported by the uncertain sentiments of professional idealists. The groups they formed, the declarations they issued, showed an uncanny similarity in language and composition to that of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. No statesman, no political figure of any importance could possibly take them seriously.<sup>87</sup>

The decline and hibernation that we have traced can be read as a story of fading panics and passing intellectual fashions or as a story of historic contingency, with the subsequent revival understood as a reflection of the growing power in the world of American ideas. I like to read it, though, as a tribute to the immense complexity of the body of thought we call natural right. It was never just one thing; it never operated at just one level or in one political or intellectual domain; it was vulnerable but never vulnerable as a whole. It sank below ground in some forms and in some places, not others. Some of it died and rotted, but some lay fallow and sprang up again when the rains came. And when various versions of natural right did spring up again in the twentieth century, they were revived in a way that transformed the doctrine. It was no longer an integrated theory of society and government, but it emerged as a set of uncompromising moral and legal constraints with which any form of social and political practice must come to terms. The modern law of human rights and the modern revival of liberal political theory cannot be equated with the theory that drove men to the barricades

<sup>86</sup> See the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and such prominent works of contractarian political philosophy as John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), and Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*.

<sup>87</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), 292.

in 1789, but they are still and undeniably a manifestation of the philosophy of natural right that flourished in Europe a hundred years before.

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## CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIETY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOCIAL THOUGHT

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If there is a single innovation that characterizes nineteenth-century social thought as a whole, it is the apparently simple idea that “society” is not the same thing as “the state.” That is, the practices and institutions that make up society are distinct in nature and function from those that define the political sphere. Although nineteenth-century thinkers disagree over both what society is and how it differs from the state, there is among them widespread (though not universal) consensus that a major shortcoming of their predecessors – Montesquieu and Rousseau are two of the more illustrious examples – was their failure to distinguish clearly between social and political forms of association. Once this distinction is made, however, a further issue arises: If society and the state are different subject matters, might they not also demand different methods of study? And if so, what is the study of society to look like? Impressed, no doubt, by the scientific advances of the previous two centuries, social philosophers of the nineteenth century generally agreed, in response to these questions, that their task was to found a *science* of society, and so thinking about what such a science would consist in became a second major preoccupation of social thought in this period. A third, somewhat independent concern of much of nineteenth-century social thought was the extent to which society is to be conceived on the model of a living organism. Even though all the thinkers to be examined here accepted some version of this analogy, they disagreed widely over precisely how societies were like organisms and, even more, over what those similarities implied.

### EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PREDECESSORS

Before examining nineteenth-century conceptions of society in detail, it will be helpful to consider briefly the roles that society and the state played for the two most important figures in eighteenth-century social and political philosophy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith. Although Rousseau is best known as a political philosopher, he is also a social philosopher of the first rank. This means that in addition to articulating a compelling theory of the basic character

of justice, the source of political obligation, and the structure of the good state, Rousseau offers deep insights into the nature and problems of nonpolitical social life. Yet, remarkably, Rousseau seems not to distinguish these two undertakings. One piece of evidence for this is that he has no terminological resources for distinguishing what we would call society from the political institutions that make up the state. Throughout his works Rousseau speaks variously of “civil society,” “political society,” and the “civil state,” but for him all of these terms refer to the same thing: a human community made up of an undifferentiated complex of political, economic, and social institutions and practices. (Interestingly, the family is the one important group that Rousseau regards as separate from the “civil state,” most likely because he takes it to be a “natural” institution rather than one that humans freely create.)<sup>1</sup> Rousseau’s failure to distinguish society from the state is more than just an issue of ill-chosen terminology. It is a substantive failing, too, and nowhere is this more visible than in the short article he composed for Diderot’s *Encyclopedia* on the topic of political economy.<sup>2</sup> Although, as we would expect, Rousseau devotes a large part of that article to what we could call social and economic policy, he understands his discussions of trade, the division of labor, and the proper balance between commerce and agriculture as part and parcel of a comprehensive theory of the state. That this is Rousseau’s view is clear already in the article’s opening paragraph, where political economy is defined as the science dealing with the wise administration, or “government,” of a state. From there, in keeping with this definition, Rousseau proceeds as though the rudiments of sound economic policy could be derived directly from the basic political principles he defends in the *Social Contract* (1762); he assumes, in other words, that the foundations of both political legitimacy and social well-being are to be sought in the one idea that underlies the whole of his philosophy, the “general will.”

Rousseau’s failure to distinguish between society and the state involves more than just his view that all of social and political theory follows from a single set of principles. In addition to this, he denies any “ontological” difference between society and the state, which is to say that for him society and the state

<sup>1</sup> This is the view of the family Rousseau sets out in the *Social Contract* (*The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997]), I.2.i. (I.2.i refers to bk. I, chap. 2, par. i of the *Social Contract*). Contrary to appearances, this view does not conflict with his claim in the Second Discourse that there is no family in the original state of nature (*The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 145, 164). In the Second Discourse, the point of invoking an original state of nature is to imagine what “human” life would be like in the absence of all enduring social relations. Taking the family to be unnatural in this sense is consistent with holding, as Rousseau does, that some social institutions (e.g., the state) are the product of human will, while others (e.g., the family) are not. It is institutions of the latter type that Rousseau calls “natural” in the *Social Contract*.

<sup>2</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, “Discourse on Political Economy” [hereafter PE], in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, 3–38.

are not different kinds of things, each with its own distinctive nature. One way of formulating this point is to say that Rousseau does not attribute fundamental differences in *structure* to what later theorists will distinguish as society and state. 'Structure' in this context refers (in part) to the kinds of relations that hold among the individual members of a social group, and so Rousseau's position amounts to the claim that there is no fundamental difference between the relations that link citizens (members of the state) and the relations that join members of other social institutions. When Rousseau addresses the issue of social structure, he typically describes civil society as a kind of organism, as an "organized, living" body that is animated by a common "self" and possesses a unitary life and will.<sup>3</sup> One feature of civil society suggested by this analogy is *specialization*; Rousseau's talk of a "collective body" implies that the state, like the human body, is made up of coordinated, qualitatively distinct parts, each of which contributes in its own way to performing some vital function (or achieving some end) of the organism as a whole.

For Rousseau, however, the concept of specialization is much less important than the more general idea that individuals who are united into a genuine body politic work to achieve the community's good as a whole rather than merely their own good as separate beings. In such a body, individuals do not think of themselves only, or primarily, as separate entities; instead, they regard themselves as integral parts of a larger being and take their own good to be inextricably bound up with the good of their fellow social members and of the body politic as a whole. In Rousseau's social and political philosophy this idea appears as the claim that in a good society citizens endorse, or "identify with," the ends of the state and willingly do their part to achieve them. To say that citizens identify with the state's ends is to say that they recognize those ends as valuable in themselves (and not merely instrumentally, as a means to their own private good) and that they take them to be of such importance that some substantial part of their own identity is invested in working to realize them. Since for Rousseau the fundamental end of a good state is to secure the necessary conditions for the freedom, security, and basic well-being of each citizen – to safeguard, in other words, the essential interests of all – a commitment to work for the good of the state as a whole converges with the concern that each member feels for the good of every other: in consciously making the ends of the good state my own, I also express my concern for the good (the essential interests) of my fellow citizens.

There is a further feature of Rousseau's social and political philosophy worth mentioning here, even though it is not, strictly speaking, a necessary implication of the failure to distinguish society and state. This feature is the thoroughly *normative*

<sup>3</sup> PE, 6; *Social Contract*, I.6.ix–x.

character of Rousseau's theory of the state. By this I mean that Rousseau's principal concern is to determine what the good (or rational or legitimate) state would look like rather than to understand how some actually existing society or institution functions; his aim, in other words, is to establish the principles that *ought* to govern the state, not those that are in fact at work in the social world we actually inhabit. Moreover, Rousseau arrives at his normative conclusions not by first surveying the world in order to see what advantages and shortcomings existing institutions have but rather by employing a species of *a priori* (or largely *a priori*) reasoning. That is, Rousseau begins from a highly abstract account of the nature and essential interests of human beings in general, and from there (taking into account certain basic truths about the world they live in) he derives the principles that ought to govern human society by reflecting on how the social world must be structured if it is to be possible for the essential interests of all of its members to be satisfied. The *a priori*, normative character of Rousseau's approach is especially conspicuous when he turns his attention to issues of economics. This is because his prescriptions on matters of commerce and trade are jarringly out of touch with what historical hindsight enables us to recognize now as the economic realities of his time. When Rousseau advocates a society in which "citizens do everything with their hands and nothing with money,"<sup>4</sup> when he asserts that "the true secret of finances and the source of their increase is to distribute food, money, and merchandise in just proportions,"<sup>5</sup> it is painfully clear that he was oblivious to the economic revolution (establishing capitalism as the dominant mode of production) that was already transforming his own world and that would shape the course of European history for at least the next two and a half centuries. No doubt Rousseau is among those Hegel has in mind when later, in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right* (1821), he derides as utopian those social philosophers who, relying on reason alone, propound theories "in opposition to what already exists" and, ignorant of the real possibilities and tendencies of their historical epoch, end up "constructing a state as it ought to be" atop a foundation of empty, impotent ideals.<sup>6</sup>

Even though Adam Smith was an ardent admirer of Rousseau's work, his own approach to the topics of social theory could hardly have been more different. Smith's most important work, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), appeared only fourteen years after the publication of Rousseau's *Social Contract*. But in contrast to the latter, Smith's work implicitly assumes a sharp distinction between society

<sup>4</sup> *Social Contract*, III.15.ii.

<sup>5</sup> PE, 27.

<sup>6</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14, 21; G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke: Theorieerkaufgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970-) [hereafter Hegel, *Werke*], 7:17, 26.

and the state. This is most easily seen in the fact that *The Wealth of Nations* focuses its attention on a single, well-defined realm of social life: the complex and intricate network of relations that exist among producers, consumers, buyers, and sellers in a free-market economy. Smith's primary aim in that work is to uncover the basic principles that govern the workings of a particular social sphere (the market economy), and, unlike Rousseau, he undertakes this task without first addressing the traditional questions of political philosophy. The methodological claim implicit in the project of *The Wealth of Nations* is that it is possible to achieve a systematic understanding of a clearly delimited sphere of social reality while abstracting completely from such issues as the nature of justice, the source of political obligation, and the structure of the good state.<sup>7</sup>

A second important difference between Smith and Rousseau concerns what I earlier called the structure of social institutions. More specifically, Smith diverges from his predecessor by abandoning the view that society – or at least the particular social sphere he is concerned with – is best understood on the model of a living organism. It is important to be precise here, for, in truth, Smith's account of the economy ascribes great importance to one of the distinctive features of living organisms, the specialization of parts that makes it possible for a single being to carry out a great variety of intricately coordinated functions. That specialization is fundamental to Smith's conception of society is made clear by the fact that for him it is the division of labor – and the specialization it implies – that is ultimately responsible for the main phenomenon *The Wealth of Nations* seeks to explain, the astonishing level of economic productivity that distinguishes wealthy, "civilized" nations from poor, undeveloped ones. Yet despite its extensive specialization, society on Smith's view lacks the essential feature of an organism: its manifold activities are not directed and regulated by an agency that in some way attends to the functioning and ends of the system as a whole. This means that one fundamental difference between society as Smith conceives it and the state as depicted in the *Social Contract* is that in the former, individual social members do not, ideally or in fact, tailor their activities according to their own (or anyone else's) understanding of the good of the institution as a whole. Indeed, for Smith the distinctive strength of a market economy is that individual participants need neither understand nor care about the collective good in order to do their part in

<sup>7</sup> Smith does not, of course, abstract from these issues entirely. For example, once he has laid out his economic theory and identified the divergent interests of the three main classes of (capitalist) society, he proceeds to ask which class is best suited to hold political power. Never a mere apologist for capitalism (contrary to popular perception), Smith concludes that the particular interests of the capitalist class directly conflict with the general interests of society, making them ill suited as leaders of the state; Adam Smith, *Works and Correspondence* (Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1976), (II)1:265–7.



achieving it. Instead, individuals decide how to act in the economic sphere from a purely egoistic perspective – they produce and trade with a view only to satisfying their own needs and desires – and the ultimate, unintended result of this universal egoism (according to Smith) is an economic system that best serves the interests of everyone.

The vision of society that underlies Smith's economic theory is one in which self-interested individuals, impelled by material needs they cannot satisfy on their own, enter into mutually advantageous relations of exchange with other similarly situated individuals; in other words, the quintessential social relation for Smith is the *contract*.<sup>8</sup> On this view, social relations consist essentially in voluntary agreements made between two individuals who encounter each other as equals (possessing the same rights and duties of exchange) and agree to cooperate – to trade, really – for mutual benefit. What binds social members on this picture is not a shared conception of the collective good nor a moral commitment to principles of justice but a contingent overlap of particular interests. This implies, as Smith explicitly acknowledges, that the basis of one social member's interest in another is nothing more than the latter's ability to serve the particular needs and wants of the former (and vice versa): "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages."<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Smith's social theory differs from Rousseau's with respect to the normative status of its principles and starting point. The simplest way of expressing this difference is to say that Smith's project makes explanation its principal goal rather than evaluation or prescription. Smith's main aim, in other words, is to understand how a part of the actual social world functions rather than to criticize or defend existing institutions or to construct superior ones from scratch. That is, Smith takes as his object a system of production and exchange that already exists and proceeds to ask not how it ought to function but why it works as it does: Which factors determine the prices of commodities and the wages of labor? How do increases in the rate of profit affect the various classes of society and the economy as a whole? What is the true source of a nation's wealth? At the same time, it is important not to overstate the extent to which explanation takes priority over normative concerns in Smith's theory. Certainly, *part* of his aim is to defend the free-market economy (as the system that most efficiently meets the needs of all), as well as to prescribe measures (such as the abolition of protectionist tariffs) that

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Smith appears to view exchange as the basis not just of economic relations but of society ("civilized society") in general; Smith, *Works*, (II)1:25–7.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *Works*, (II)1:26–7.

ensure its optimal performance. Still, Smith's efforts to evaluate and prescribe differ importantly from Rousseau's. The normative judgments he comes to derive not from a priori arguments about which institutions are ideally suited to human beings given their essential nature,<sup>10</sup> but from a comprehensive account of how actual institutions function and of what they are capable of accomplishing under favorable but realistic conditions; his prescriptions are limited to measures that would fine-tune an already functioning system rather than call for replacing what exists with a more perfect but wholly invented ideal.

### HEGEL

With respect to the issue of normativity, G. W. F. Hegel's social and political philosophy can be regarded as a synthesis of Rousseau's and Smith's positions. As was the case with Rousseau, Hegel's main concern is normative rather than explanatory. That is, his principal aim is to demonstrate the rationality, or goodness, of what he takes to be the three major social institutions of the modern world: the nuclear family, civil society (roughly, the sphere of market-governed production and exchange), and the constitutional state. Beyond this, Hegel also follows Rousseau in making *freedom* the fundamental value in terms of which the goodness of institutions is to be assessed.<sup>11</sup> His basic philosophical strategy, in other words, is to argue that the institutions of (western European) modernity are rational precisely because they play essential roles in realizing the freedom of their members (and of society considered as a whole).<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Hegel explicitly rejects Rousseau's largely a priori method of justification in favor of a strategy that is closer to Smith's. As I noted previously, Hegel does not take his task to consist in constructing, from scratch, a picture of the ideal social world that can then serve as the standard against which existing social reality is measured. Instead, Hegel begins by acquainting himself, in detail, with how the principal institutions of his time (and place) actually function. His treatment of the family, for example, is based on an extensive acquaintance with both ancient and

<sup>10</sup> This is not to deny that Smith makes use of a normative conception of nature (and human nature). But his conception of what is "natural" for human beings plays much less of a role in justifying the market economy than his analysis of how the capitalist economy works and of its general consequences for human well-being.

<sup>11</sup> This feature of Rousseau's view is evident in his formulation of the central task of political philosophy: "Find a form of association that will defend . . . the person and goods of each associate . . . by means of which each . . . obeys only himself and remains as free as before"; *Social Contract*, I.6.iv.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the freedoms that individual social members enjoy, Hegel holds that the rational society *itself* (i.e., as a whole) is self-determining, or free, because, like biological organisms, it has the capacity to maintain and reproduce itself. See Frederick Neuhouser, *The Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 38–44.

contemporary family law and practices,<sup>13</sup> and his famous account of civil society is informed by a thorough knowledge of the most advanced economic theories of his time, including, of course, Smith's.<sup>14</sup> What makes his method ultimately different from Smith's is that Hegel takes to his empirical study of the world a general, not fully determinate notion of the standard a social world would have to measure up to in order to qualify as rational. That is, Hegel "knows" in advance of his empirical studies that if social institutions are to count as good, they must somehow promote the ideal of freedom, but this alone does not enable him to determine, prior to those studies, exactly what institutions ought to be like in order to realize that ideal most effectively. In light of this fact, Hegel's procedure is to examine existing institutions (or the general model they instantiate) with a view to discovering how, concretely, their normal functioning helps to make freedom a reality. Hegel's method, then, is predicated on the idea that although philosophical reflection can provide us with a general notion of the ideal that good institutions promote, it cannot on its own – independently of all empirical knowledge of history and society – determine precisely what institutions ought to be like if that ideal is to be realized.

Hegel, more than any other thinker of the nineteenth century, is responsible for making the distinction between society and the state an established doctrine of social and political philosophy. In doing so, he appropriates one of the terms that Rousseau used indiscriminately to refer to both social and political institutions – civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) – and assigns it a specific meaning that clearly distinguishes it from the set of political institutions that he calls the state (*Staat*).<sup>15</sup> It is tempting to think that 'civil society' for Hegel refers to the same social sphere that Smith makes his object of study in the *Wealth of Nations*, the market-governed economy. But even though institutions of production and exchange make up the core of civil society, they do not exhaust it. This becomes clear when one discovers that the chapter of the *Philosophy of Right* that Hegel devotes to civil society includes discussions of a number of institutions – the courts, police, and "corporations" – that it would be difficult to classify as economic. It might be thought, then, that Hegel simply expands civil society to include those functions of government that are required for the smooth functioning of a market economy, such as a legal system to enforce contracts and protect property and

<sup>13</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §§172–5, 180; Hegel, *Werke* 7:324–8, 333–8.

<sup>14</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §189; Hegel, *Werke* 7:346–7.

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, Hegel uses "state" in two senses. Sometimes it refers only to specifically political institutions (e.g., the monarchy, parliament, the judiciary) and is contrasted with nonpolitical social institutions (civil society and the family). At other times it refers to the entire ensemble of institutions, including the state in the narrower sense. Obviously, it is the state in the first of these meanings that Hegel regards as distinct from society.

a public works agency that builds roads, lights the streets, and provides for clean water and air. But this suggestion, too, fails to capture everything Hegel meant to include within civil society (for example, the mission of the police to ensure that the necessities of life are accessible to all).<sup>16</sup> This is because the difference between society and the state as Hegel conceives it rests on something deeper than the common sense distinction between legal (or governmental) institutions, on the one hand, and economic institutions, on the other.

The real basis of Hegel's distinction lies in the claim that the state and civil society differ fundamentally with respect to their structure, purpose, and principle of origin. Or, to express this point differently: each form of association presupposes a distinct conception of human beings, their good, and the kind of relations to others that realizing that good entails. Civil society for Hegel has its origin in the material neediness of human beings (which is why he refers to its central institutions of production and exchange as "the system of needs").<sup>17</sup> In this claim Hegel simply echoes Rousseau and Smith, both of whom single out material dependence – the inability of individuals to satisfy their basic needs without the cooperation of others – as the feature of the human condition that makes society necessary. Hegel, however, goes beyond his predecessors in recognizing (under the influence of J. G. Herder) a kind of human association – *political* society, or "the state" – that addresses a different aspect of humans, namely, their status as cultural beings whose fundamental beliefs, values, and self-conceptions are shaped by the particular culture, or "spirit," of the people (*Volk*) to which they belong. The state, then, can also be said to have its origin in human need, but in one that is spiritual rather than material: the need to give expression to one's cultural identity by participating in the collective life of a people (*Volk*).<sup>18</sup> As Hegel conceives it, political community addresses this need principally by creating the public space within which citizens discuss, formulate, and finally reach consensus on the laws that best reflect their shared conception of the community's collective good.

Since the state and civil society respond to different human needs, it is clear that their respective "purposes" (what makes them rational and defines the standards for assessing their goodness) will also differ: one purpose of civil society is to provide for the material well-being of its members in as efficient a manner as possible, while a central purpose of the state is to afford citizens the opportunity for cultural membership and self-expression. For Hegel, though, the rational

<sup>16</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §§235, 236, 241; Hegel, *Werke* 7:384–5, 387–8.

<sup>17</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §189; Hegel, *Werke* 7:346.

<sup>18</sup> Hegel makes clear that what unites a people is not the natural bond of blood but a shared culture; G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Philosophie des Rechts: Die Mitschriften Wannemann (Heidelberg 1817/18) und Homeyer (Berlin 1818/19)*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ilting (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983), 250, 268.

purpose of an institution extends beyond its ability to meet the needs that bring it into existence and account for its enduring necessity. As I indicated earlier, it is freedom, not the satisfaction of need, that counts for Hegel as the fundamental value that good institutions promote. Thus, both civil society and the state – as institutions Hegel affirms as good – must in some way promote human freedom. This claim might be taken to point to a fundamental similarity between the two types of association, but in fact it highlights a further difference. This is because each realizes a distinct kind of freedom. In civil society individuals are free in the sense that they are accorded the right to act as they choose without interference from the state or other individuals (provided they do not violate others' rights to do the same). Constrained only by the equal rights of others, members of civil society are at liberty to dispose of their property as they wish, to enter into whatever private associations they choose, and to pursue their own happiness as they see fit. The freedom individuals achieve as members of the state, in contrast, is a type of autonomy, or self-governance. On this conception, freedom consists not in the mere absence of external constraints but in subjecting one's actions to principles, or laws, that have their source in one's own will. The idea here is that being constrained to act in accordance with principles is compatible with freedom as long as those principles originate, in some significant sense, in oneself. In the state as Hegel envisages it, citizens are autonomous, or self-determining, because the laws that govern them are the results of a transparent process of collective deliberation that is guided by a shared conception of the community's good and in which the particular interests of all segments of society are represented.

Given this difference in the kind of freedom that civil society and the state promote, it is no surprise that the two spheres differ as well with respect to their internal structure. On Hegel's view, the basic relations among members of civil society are precisely those that Smith attributed to buyers and sellers in a market economy: "In civil society, each individual is his own end, and all else means nothing to him. But he cannot accomplish the full extent of his ends without reference to others; these others are therefore means to the end of the particular [person]." <sup>19</sup> As members of the state, in contrast, individuals relate to one another as do the citizens of a Rousseauian community governed by the general will – that is, they regard their community's good as a whole (as well as that of their fellow citizens) as integral to their own good, as an end they willingly work to achieve because they value it for its own sake, not merely as a means to their own particular ends. To its credit, Hegel's view is complicated by his recognition that civil society contains within itself certain forms of association – most notably, the "corporations" – in which relations among individuals approximate those

<sup>19</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §182; Hegel, *Werke* 7:339–40.

that characterize the state. Corporations are voluntary associations, such as labor guilds and trade organizations, that members of civil society join for the purpose of furthering their own particular economic interests. By joining with other individuals whose particular interests converge with their own, members of corporations promote their own particular interests while forging bonds with others that eventually go beyond mutual self-interest. The act of associating with other members of one's trade or profession and of working together to achieve a common goal has the effect of creating affective, fraternal bonds among the corporation's members and of inspiring in them a noninstrumental concern for the good of their associates as well as an allegiance to the interests of their corporation as a whole. In this way, civil society, whose first principle is the egoism of independently acting individuals, shows itself to contain, internal to its own workings, an impetus to instill in its members the very habits of mind and character on which political association depends.

The difference in structure between civil society and the state suggests a further way in which the rational purposes of the two spheres can be contrasted, for implicit in the claim that the relations among individuals in one sphere differ from those in another is a corresponding claim about the identities, or self-conceptions, that the members of those spheres develop and express: members of civil society think of themselves as separate individuals whose good is defined exclusively in terms of their (and their family's)<sup>20</sup> particular needs and wants, whereas the citizen thinks of himself<sup>21</sup> first as the member of a particular people – as a Frenchman or Prussian – whose overriding interest is his people's collective good. This implies, for Hegel, that part of what makes civil society and the state rational, or good, is that together they provide individuals with the social space in which to develop and express two very different kinds of identities: "universal," or communal, identities as citizens who share a cultural tradition and "particular" identities as beings who are defined by qualities that distinguish them from others. Rousseau, of course, had already emphasized the value of the former in his political philosophy; what Hegel adds to that view is the insight that a world in which universality is achieved at the expense of particular differences is both oppressive and impoverished. It is in this spirit that Hegel utters his well-known characterization – and defense – of civil society as the social realm that "gives *particularity* the right to develop and express itself in all directions."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For Hegel, members of civil society are typically male heads of families; *Philosophy of Right*, §171; Hegel, *Werke* 7:324.

<sup>21</sup> The male pronoun is appropriate here since women are excluded from the state; *Philosophy of Right*, §§166, 301; Hegel, *Werke* 7:319, 469.

<sup>22</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, §184; Hegel, *Werke* 7:340. Of course, as Hegel makes clear, civil society is rational only because, along with satisfying the "principle of particularity," it also accommodates the demands of "universality" (*Philosophy of Right*, §§182–3, 186; Hegel, *Werke* 7:339–40, 343). By

Since, for Hegel, distinguishing civil society and the state involves ascribing different purposes to the two spheres, it is natural to wonder how, or whether, those purposes are compatible. In addressing this question Hegel returns to the familiar analogy of the biological organism. In this context it is what I shall call “the social whole”<sup>23</sup> – the ensemble of institutions that includes the family, civil society, and the state – that Hegel thinks of as an organism. Part of what makes the social whole an organism is that its composite parts carry out specialized functions. As we saw previously, civil society and the state address different human needs, realize different sorts of freedom, and enable their members to express different kinds of identities. With respect to this issue, Hegel clearly regards the two spheres as complementary rather than antagonistic: each offers its members distinctive goods that are valuable in themselves, and participation in both is essential to being a complete human being. This itself, of course, does not guarantee the absence of conflict between civil society and the state; on the contrary, as Hegel explicitly acknowledges, the distinct purposes of the two spheres create an enduring tension between them. So, for example, the very egoism that drives civil society has the potential to undermine the communal identities required for citizenship; similarly, the material inequalities that result from unregulated economic activity can make for so deep a conflict of interests among classes that political measures alone cannot reconcile them. For this reason, the social whole on Hegel’s account must possess a further feature of a biological organism: the capacity to coordinate its specialized functions so as to achieve its good as a whole. This activity of oversight and coordination Hegel assigns to the state, for a primary goal of rational legislation is to reconcile the potential conflicts among social spheres and at the same time preserve the integrity and relative autonomy of each. In the end, then, Hegel not only distinguishes civil society from the state but also asserts the latter’s *primacy*: though possessing its own function and purpose, civil society nevertheless depends on the state’s supervision – on the social organism’s brain, as it were – for its proper functioning.

## MARX

The most significant social theorist of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx, is widely regarded as the preeminent inheritor of Hegel’s philosophical legacy (at least in the realm of social and political thought). Yet Marx’s project of establishing

the latter, he means (among other things) that civil society both promotes the general welfare of society and forms, or educates (*bildet*), its members to conceive of themselves as *human beings* in the abstract, equal in moral standing to all other humans.

<sup>23</sup> As noted previously, Hegel also (and confusingly) uses the term “state” to refer to this whole. See note 15.

a science of society owes at least as much to Smith's efforts to discover the principles that explain the functioning of a market economy. Marx's debt to *The Wealth of Nations* is most evident in his main economic work, *Capital* (1867). This work's primary aim, according to Marx, is "to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society,"<sup>24</sup> and, as its title indicates, the key to explaining modern society is to understand how its economic system – capitalism – functions. Like Smith, Marx begins his science with an investigation into such fundamental issues as the nature of exchange value, the laws that explain the exchange rates of commodities, and the source of capitalist profit (or "surplus value"). Marx's economic project differs from Smith's, however, in at least one very important way: when Marx takes the laws of capitalist economy as his object of study, he understands them to be laws of *development* (rather than the laws of a fixed, unchanging system). In other words, society in Marx's theory is not a static phenomenon governed by eternally valid laws but a constantly evolving system whose very nature necessitates its eventual transformation. (This is the point at which the seemingly irresistible analogy of the biological organism asserts itself in Marx's thought. Here the aspect of organic life that is highlighted is the necessary pattern of development the organism follows in completing the stages of its life cycle.) Accordingly, the core of Marx's economic theory is devoted to understanding how capitalism is destined to change over time; its central task is to explain what effect the continued accumulation of capitalist profit must have on such factors as the length of the working day, the rate of profit, and, most importantly, the well-being of the working class. What this inquiry reveals, Marx believes, is the inevitability of capitalism's demise and its eventual replacement by a new mode of production, communism, which is superior both ethically and economically to the one it supplants.

Marx's emphasis on the scientific status of his theory should not blind us to its indisputably normative character. (Neither Smith nor Hegel nor Marx subscribed to the positivist view of science, according to which 'scientific' implies 'value-free'.) On this issue Marx's position is probably nearest to Smith's. If, as Marx asserts, a proper understanding of capitalism shows it to lead not, as Smith believed, to the general enrichment of society's members but instead to the ever-increasing impoverishment and exploitation of workers (and to a growing polarization within society), then clearly, once it has reached a certain point in its development, capitalism is destructive of human well-being and so a legitimate object of critique. Yet Marx also incorporates an important element of Hegel's

<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975–) [hereafter Marx, CW], 35:10; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1961–6) [hereafter Marx, MEW], 23:15–16.



normative approach to social theory, insofar as one of his most important criticisms of capitalism presupposes the Hegelian view that, in addition to its usefulness in satisfying material needs, social life ought also to be for its members the site of an important species of freedom, or (more precisely) self-expression. In Marx's theory this view manifests itself in the charge that labor under the conditions of capitalism *alienates* workers, or prevents them from realizing their full potential as human beings. Rather than being the source of self-expression, community, and a benign mastery of nature, labor in capitalism, organized for the sole purpose of producing profit for others, yields for the workers themselves only disfigurement, impoverishment, and enduring social conflict.

One further aspect of Marx's conception of a science of society is worthy of mention since it bears on the question of what society (for Marx) is and what place the economy occupies within it. It is tempting to think of economics as a science that investigates certain relations among *things*, namely, commodities that are bought and sold on the market. To Marx, however, it is of the greatest importance to establish that economics is, at root, a *social science*. By this Marx means that a scientific understanding of capitalism must uncover not just the laws that determine the movement of commodities in a market economy but also the social relations – the relations of domination among human beings – that underlie the motions of things. On Marx's view, an inquiry into the conditions presupposed by capitalism's central phenomenon – the creation of surplus value – brings to light the true character of the social relations on which that mode of production is based: the wage-labor contract between worker and capitalist presupposes (and reproduces) a fundamental inequality in control over the means of production among society's members, and the appropriation of surplus value by capitalists is made possible only through the systematic *exploitation* of those who enter into that contract from a disadvantaged position. In other words, capitalism functions only because one social class possesses the power to make another class labor for the purpose of its (the first class's) private enrichment, and the accumulation of profit is nothing but the economic process through which one group of individuals oppresses another. A central aim of Marx's science of society, then, is to replace the picture of society as it appears to common sense (and to Smith) with a view of its true, underlying character: rather than being founded on equitable, voluntary relations that are entered into by equally situated and benignly self-interested individuals, modern society – indeed, all human society hitherto known – is predicated on a fundamental opposition of its members' interests, a perpetual struggle between social classes and the systematic exploitation of those who labor by those who do not.

Marx's social thought relies heavily on a particular version of the distinction Hegel drew between civil society and the state. Marx concurs with his predecessor

that a proper grasp of social reality requires one to distinguish sharply between the social and political realms, but he moves beyond Hegel's view in two important ways: first, his definition of society is both narrower and more precise than Hegel's conception of civil society; second, he reverses Hegel's view<sup>25</sup> on the relation between the two spheres by ascribing (explanatory) primacy to society and reducing the state to a mere epiphenomenon.

The essence of Marx's view of society is summed up in a single phrase that appears throughout his mature (post-1844) writings on the dynamics of historical development, namely, "the economic structure of society."<sup>26</sup> The view expressed in that phrase is not that society is *identical with* the economy but rather that the *core* of the former – its underlying structure – is constituted by the latter. For Marx, this means that the key to understanding social phenomena in general lies in the economic relations individuals establish to one another in the production of their material life – or, in other words, in what he calls a society's *relations of production*. This term, as Marx uses it, refers not to just any kind of relation among producers (for example, the cooperative division of labor that defines the tasks of workers on an assembly line) but to one specific, fundamental relation that is indisputably economic in character: individuals' ownership (or nonownership) of a society's *productive forces*, or means of production. The great importance of this economic category for Marx is made clear by the fact that it furnishes the criterion for distinguishing the two major classes that make up capitalist society: capitalists own (and hence control) the principal material prerequisites of production (factories, tools, and raw materials), while workers own no productive forces apart from their own labor power. As I indicated earlier, Marx sees economic phenomena as consisting, most fundamentally, not in relations between people and things but rather in relations of social power among human individuals (or classes). What is important to him, then, about the property relations that constitute society's "economic structure" is their impact on the distribution of social power between classes: it is precisely because workers do not own factories, land, or the instruments of production that they are forced (if they wish to live) to sell their labor power to capitalists; and it is because capitalists alone own those productive forces that they are able to organize the labor process so as to serve the overriding end of capitalist production, the accumulation of private profit. Marx's claim that societies have an "economic structure" implies that the most prominent noneconomic features of a society – its "social consciousness," for example – can be explained

<sup>25</sup> It is important to note, though, that the primacy Hegel ascribes to the state is not explanatory primacy. Rather, membership in the state is "ethically higher" than membership in civil society, since it involves a conscious willing of collective ("universal") ends; *Philosophy of Right*, §258; Hegel, *Werke* 7:399.

<sup>26</sup> Marx, *CW* 29:263; Marx, *MEW* 13:8.

by the relations of production that prevail within it. Or, as Marx formulates this thesis: “the mode of production of material life conditions the general processes of social, political, and intellectual life.”<sup>27</sup> Society, in other words, is at root a mode of material production.

This statement of Marx’s view indicates the form that the distinction between society and the state assumes in his philosophy: the essence, or structure, of society is identified with its economic order, and the nature of the state – what Marx calls the “legal and political superstructure” of society<sup>28</sup> – is said to follow from that basic structure. For Marx this means that the political institutions of a given social order are explained by the fact that they help to stabilize or reinforce its relations of production. (Representative democracy, for example, might support capitalist property relations by fostering ideals of individual autonomy on which the flourishing of a market economy depends.) Since those relations themselves embody fundamental inequalities in social power, the state in effect ensures the continued existence of an exploitative system and so, in the end, functions as an instrument of class oppression. Rather than reconciling the differences among citizens, as Hegel believed, politics merely perpetuates and masks the irreconcilable conflicts of interest that mark society at its deepest level.

#### TOCQUEVILLE

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the distinction between society and the state had become a virtual axiom of social and political theory, even for those thinkers who for the most part remained outside the sphere of Hegel’s influence. One prominent example of this trend is Alexis de Tocqueville, whose masterpiece in political theory, *Democracy in America* (1835), explicitly, but without fanfare, announces its reliance on a version of this distinction on its opening page. In formulating the central thesis of his work, Tocqueville asserts that the influence of what he takes to be the fundamental fact of American society – “the equality of conditions” – extends “well beyond political mores and laws, and ... gains no less dominion over civil society than over government.”<sup>29</sup> That Tocqueville treats as self-evident the distinction between politics, laws, and the state, on the one hand, and “civil society,” on the other, is even more striking when one considers that this distinction is entirely absent from the work of Montesquieu, the thinker to whom he is (by far) most indebted. It is not just that Montesquieu tends to use

<sup>27</sup> Marx, CW 29:263; Marx, MEW 13:8–9. This statement can be regarded as the central thesis of Marx’s “historical materialism.”

<sup>28</sup> Marx, CW 29:263; Marx, MEW 13:8.

<sup>29</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, eds. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

'society', 'state', and 'nation' interchangeably,<sup>30</sup> but also that in articulating the three basic types of human "societies" – republic, monarchy, and despotism – he finds it natural to employ the same criterion Aristotle used to distinguish among political regimes: the number of individuals who hold sovereign power.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to Montesquieu's view that society is essentially defined by its political regime, Tocqueville distinguishes clearly between social and political phenomena and accords (a specific kind of) explanatory primacy to the former.

The primacy that Tocqueville accords to the social is most clearly seen in the fact that he locates the fundamental feature of American society (and of modern society more generally)<sup>32</sup> – the feature "from which each particular fact seemed to issue"<sup>33</sup> – in a condition that, as he insists, is social rather than political. Although he labels this condition *democracy*, Tocqueville is at pains to point out that he means by this term not political but "social" democracy, which, as the preceding quotation makes clear, consists in a certain "equality of condition" among the members of society. The equality at issue here is not political or economic equality but social equality, defined primarily as the absence of hereditary class distinctions, along with the differences in rights, standing, and way of life that those distinctions imply. Yet social equality is a more inclusive phenomenon than this simple definition suggests, for, in Tocqueville's view, the disappearance of hereditary classes infuses modern society with an entirely new character. One of its consequences is the tendency not just to equality but also to *uniformity* (and conformism). In tandem with this, members of modern society tend to be individualistic in their outlook and engagements. Because they are motivated largely by self-interest, their own private affairs (which include the concerns of their immediate family) become the principal focus of their attention and activity. The quest for personal honor gives way to the less socially disruptive desire for comfort and peace, and general well-being or prosperity replaces national glory and power as the reigning ideal of social policy. (The nineteenth-century utilitarian ideal of the greatest good for the greatest number is a perfect expression of the spirit of what Tocqueville calls democracy.) Finally, in accordance with these developments, commercial and industrial activity becomes more important to modern society than military conquest or service to God.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Charles de Secondat, baron de la Brède Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, eds. Anne Cohler, Basia Miller, and Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6–7.

<sup>31</sup> Montesquieu introduces two further criteria for distinguishing societies as well. The first looks to how sovereign power is exercised (whether "by fixed and established laws" or "without law and rule"), while the second considers what a society's "principle," or animating sentiment, is; *The Spirit of the Laws*, 10, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 3–4.

<sup>33</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> As the imperialism of nineteenth-century Europe was to show, Tocqueville clearly underestimates the extent to which modern democracies rely on war and the conquest of foreign peoples to achieve their ends.

Although Tocqueville often speaks as if this basic social fact determined every other social and political feature of a modern society, his actual analyses of contemporary societies suggest a more complex and interesting position, for if there is a main philosophical point to Tocqueville's many insightful observations on American and French society,<sup>35</sup> it is that democratic societies (in the sense defined earlier) can have different political regimes. (This is precisely the possibility that Montesquieu cannot allow for, since he distinguishes societies only according to their political structure.) For both the United States and France, for example, social equality is (by the nineteenth century) a fundamental and irreversible fact, yet democracy at the level of society is accompanied by different political orders in each. On the basis of his studies of America and France, Tocqueville concludes that the political character of democratic societies can assume one of two forms: it can tend either to freedom (as in America) or to despotism (as in France). The thought underlying this claim is that the basic fact of modern societies (social equality) must manifest itself in political life, too, but that it can do so in two different ways. Translated into the political sphere, the principle of equality implies that "rights must be given [either] to each citizen or to no one."<sup>36</sup> Since the rights Tocqueville has in mind are rights of political participation, freedom for him consists primarily in political sovereignty; freedom for all, then, is essentially equivalent to democracy in its most common, *political* meaning: real popular participation in the exercise of state power.

Tocqueville's view is that although democratic societies "instinctively" tend toward freedom, it is not the only political path open to them.<sup>37</sup> Much of Tocqueville's best-known work is devoted to understanding why, in the case of America, liberty wins out over despotism (even though a form of the latter – tyranny of the majority – remains a perpetual threat even there). In effect, his rich and detailed reflections on American life amount to an argument for the claim that the liberal political conditions of America are due to the convergence of a variety of factors. Among these, to be sure, Tocqueville mentions fortuitous circumstances of history and geography, but the factors he emphasizes most fall into two broad categories, "laws" and "mores." The first of these includes specific laws, institutions, and other enduring features of both social and political life, such as a federalist constitution (as opposed to centralized power), the separation of powers, frequent elections, an independent judiciary, freedom of the press, a flourishing civil society, and an abundance of voluntary associations. The second

<sup>35</sup> The latter is the topic of Tocqueville's other major work, *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (New York, 1856).

<sup>36</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 52.

<sup>37</sup> This is because "freedom is not the principal and continuous object of [democratic peoples'] desire; what they love with an eternal love is equality"; Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 52.

category is more difficult to define but even more influential than laws in determining the nature and extent of political freedom.<sup>38</sup> The “mores” of a society, as Tocqueville understands them, correspond roughly to what Marx would later call “social consciousness.” For Tocqueville, it is primarily America’s educational system, its Puritan moral values, and – most important – its religious beliefs and practices that explain the generally liberal character of American democracy. The view of society that ultimately informs Tocqueville’s thought, then, is this: the basic character of social and political life is given by a single fundamental *social* fact that is “universal, ... enduring, and defies all human interference.”<sup>39</sup> (In the modern world this fact is democracy, or social equality.) But even though this fundamental fact delimits the political options available to a society, it does not by itself determine which of them is realized. Instead, the political tenor of a society – whether it tends in general to freedom or despotism – is the result of specific social and political forces that together give concrete shape and direction to the underlying social condition that defines a society’s essential character.

#### COMTE

In addition to the traditions represented by Hegel and Marx, on the one hand, and by Tocqueville, on the other, the nineteenth century saw the rise of a third tradition in social thought, the founder of which was Auguste Comte. (Although he wrote at roughly the same time and in the same country as Tocqueville, Comte does not appear to have been influenced significantly by his compatriot.) The leading idea of Comte’s thought – the inspiration for which he found in the work of the French *philosophe* Destutt de Tracy and of his employer and mentor, Saint-Simon – is that the task of modern social theory is to establish a *science* of social phenomena, one modeled on (though not identical to) the already established, natural sciences. The aim of this science – for which Comte invented the term ‘sociology’ – is to discover the unchanging laws that govern both the functioning and the evolution of societies. Achieving this aim, for Comte, requires abandoning the a priori, normative approach of traditional philosophers, such as Rousseau, and relying instead on the empirical, entirely “positive” procedures of true science: observation, comparison (which in sociology takes the place of experimentation), and the establishing of lawlike regularities in the relations of succession and resemblance among phenomena.

Interestingly enough, though, the founder of modern sociology remained out of step with nineteenth-century social thought in one crucial respect: in defining

<sup>38</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 292, 293.

<sup>39</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 6; translation amended.

the subject matter of his new science he does not distinguish clearly or consistently between society and the state. Like Montesquieu before him, Comte tends to treat 'state', 'society', and 'nation' as interchangeable terms. Moreover, in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau's approach to economics, Comte treats political science as a mere subfield within the larger, essentially homogeneous science of sociology. In addition to the view that a single method guides the study of both social and political phenomena, this position implies that society and the state are not fundamentally distinct in origin, function, or purpose. Thus, according to Comte, political institutions are a natural outgrowth of structures of authority already present in smaller social groups (such as the family or the factory), and the relations among members of those groups – including relations of authority – do not differ in kind from the relations citizens have to one another in the state. Similarly, the essential function of government is continuous with that of other forms of social organization: the state's principal purpose is simply to direct and coordinate the various productive activities on which society's survival and well-being depend.

Even though Comte regards physics and chemistry as the earliest and best established of the natural sciences, it is biology that he takes as the model for his new science of society. This is because biology, like sociology, studies the functioning and development of complex, highly organized entities – living organisms, in the first case, and whole societies, in the second. Thus, like his predecessors Rousseau and Hegel, Comte embraces a version of the idea that the key to understanding society lies in viewing it as a collective organism. An important implication of this principle – one that was to have great influence on Comte's most illustrious successor, Émile Durkheim – is what can be called the "primacy of whole over part."<sup>40</sup> In biology, wholes have primacy over their parts in the sense that explaining the origin and function of a particular organ depends on understanding its role in the development and functioning of the organism as a whole: in order to explain what a heart is, for example, it is necessary to say how it works together with other parts of the body to achieve a "purpose" of the organism as a whole. In sociology, then, too, explaining particular phenomena – from the division of labor to the structure of the state – requires situating them in relation to the nature and function of society as a whole.

A further implication of the analogy between society and organism follows from what Comte (along with Rousseau and Hegel) regards as an organism's essential characteristic: a harmony of form and function that, through the coordinated action of specialized parts, works to achieve a collective, unifying end. One

<sup>40</sup> Raymond Aron emphasizes this point (using different terminology) in his lucid exposition of Comte's position; *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* (London: Penguin, 1965), 1:67.

crucial difference, however, between societies and (nonhuman) organisms is that in the latter, the ends of the whole can be achieved without a *conscious* agency that directs and oversees its activities. In the case of societies, this coordinative function can be carried out only by a kind of shared consciousness – a “universal consensus”<sup>41</sup> – that makes individuals into members of a collective whole and gives functional unity to a society’s various institutions and subgroups. The functions of this collective consciousness include managing society’s commercial and productive activities, assigning social roles to individuals in accordance with their abilities, and, not least important, inspiring and regulating the behavior of social members by educating them to understand and endorse the norms, or purposes, that animate modern society and give legitimacy to it. In earlier societies, universal consensus – especially in its ideological, or legitimacy-bestowing, function – was the province of traditional religion. In the modern world, however, this function is to be carried out by a class of functionaries – “priests,” as Comte sometimes refers to them – who have assimilated the doctrines of positive science (or positive “religion”)<sup>42</sup> and who convey those truths to the rest of society’s members, thereby securing the universal consensus that gives unity and direction to the social organism. One implication of the great importance Comte assigns to universal consensus is that for him, in marked contrast to Marx, what ultimately defines and gives shape to a society is *the mode of thinking* that is dominant within it; in modern societies this mode of thinking is *scientific* (rather than theological or metaphysical), and this produces a society whose main activity and principle of organization is *industrial* (rather than military).

Despite his insistence that genuine science seeks neither first nor final causes,<sup>43</sup> Comte’s sociology clearly ascribes certain rational purposes, or ends, to modern society that, in effect, provide him with normative criteria that serve both to evaluate existing societies and to guide social policy. This element of teleology, too, follows from his reliance on the analogy between societies and organisms. Just as biology ascribes natural ends to living organisms, Comte’s sociology assumes that the social organism has certain necessary ends that explain its historical development and define its progress. Moreover – and not surprisingly – these ends are similar to those that biology attributes to living organisms. For Comte, social progress is defined as increased human control over the natural environment that is achieved through ever more extensive specialization and more perfectly

<sup>41</sup> Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J. H. Bridges (New York: Robert Speller, 1865), 402–10.

<sup>42</sup> See chap. 6, “The Religion of Humanity,” of Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 355–444.

<sup>43</sup> By this Comte means that science cannot explain (ultimately) why something functions and develops as it does but is limited instead to uncovering the general laws that describe how things function and develop.



adapted (and coordinated) “organs” and subsystems of society. Implicit in this conception of progress is the view that in advanced societies, the struggle of humans against nature comes to replace the struggle *among* humans that characterizes primitive societies (as well as most of history before Comte). As Comte envisages it – again, in contrast to Marx – modern, industrial society is engaged in a collective project of increasing its wealth and mastering nature in which, despite extensive differences among its members in both occupation and class,<sup>44</sup> the private interests of all are in essential harmony.

#### SPENCER AND SOCIAL DARWINISM

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of an influential group of social theorists – the so-called social Darwinists – who gave a distinctive twist to the idea that society is to be viewed on the model of a living organism. For them, this analogy implied that the key to establishing a science of society lay in appropriating the methods and outlook of the newest advance in biological science, Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Although the founder of this school, Herbert Spencer, developed his main ideas before the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859), much of the influence social Darwinism enjoyed in subsequent decades depended on the perception that Spencer and his followers were simply applying the principles of Darwinian science to social life. This perception was no doubt encouraged by the fact that Spencer explicitly based his approach to social theory on the idea that whatever their superficial differences, biological and social “organisms” are subject to the same laws of evolutionary development.

The philosophical foundations of Spencer’s theory are given in a ponderous and highly abstract account of the principles that govern the evolution of all living things. According to the most basic of these laws, evolution consists in a passage “from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity.”<sup>45</sup> More precisely, Spencer holds that homogeneous entities are inherently unstable and so, over time, tend to develop into heterogeneous beings with differentiated parts. Along with heterogeneity is the tendency of differentiated parts to become segregated and eventually to acquire specialized functions and characteristics. After this, the coordination of specialized parts produces a “coherent” heterogeneity that enables the resulting organism to take full advantage of its differentiated capacities. The most significant respect in which this

<sup>44</sup> Although Comte was not an advocate of free enterprise and competition, he believed private property (including the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few) to be necessary for social prosperity.

<sup>45</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Collected Works* (London: Routledge, 1996) [hereafter Spencer, CW] 5:396.

conception of the evolutionary process diverges from Darwin's is that, at least in the case of the social organism, Spencer posits an end point – a state of “equilibration” – at which perfect adaptation has been achieved and no impetus for further development is present.

Applying this evolutionary scheme to society, Spencer argues that once human beings have segregated themselves into discrete social units, the process of achieving equilibration takes the form of an ongoing “struggle for existence” among these differentiated units, giving rise to a militaristic phase of history in which intersocietal conflict is the dominant human activity. According to Spencer's laws of evolution, however, this initial phase must eventually give way to a process of social integration in which, without completely losing their distinct characters, societies are combined into ever larger units, cooperation replaces competition as the best adaptive strategy, and peaceful, industrial activity becomes human society's chief occupation. (Here, clearly, Spencer was influenced by Comte's vision of the stages of human history.) On Spencer's view, then, social evolution involves not merely change but *progress* toward both material and ethical perfection.

It was not, however, Spencer's conception of evolution that most deeply impressed his followers but the implications for social and political theory that he (and most of them)<sup>46</sup> took his evolutionary point of view to have. For the most influential of his successors, Spencer's principal legacy was the idea that there exists for societies, as for biological organisms, a *natural* pattern of activity and development whose discovery constitutes the main task of social science. (In studying the free market economy, Smith, too, placed great weight on the idea of society's natural condition, but, unlike the social Darwinists, he did not conceive of the natural as the necessary outcome [or stage] of a predetermined, quasi-biological course of development.) One claim that seemed to follow from Spencer's evolutionary approach – especially to later thinkers familiar with Darwin's account of how species evolve – was that genuine progress in society could result only from slow and gradual development, not from sudden changes or radical upheaval. Another view of Spencer's that later social Darwinists tended to emphasize was that scientifically guided social policy repudiates all attempts to alter or intervene in society's natural course of development. Since Spencer took science to show that the latter involves a “struggle for existence” among individuals that results in the “survival of the fittest” (a term that he, not Darwin, invented), the practical upshot of his theory was a far more extreme version of *laissez-faire* individualism than any that Smith himself would have considered reasonable. Government aid

<sup>46</sup> Not all social Darwinists, however, were political conservatives. One notable exception is the English biologist T. H. Huxley, who argued that social progress requires humans to mitigate the raw struggle for existence in the name of ethical ideals that do not themselves derive from nature; *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (New York: Humboldt, 1894).

to the poor, state-financed education, public health measures, even the regulation of commerce – all were measures that Spencer regarded as misguided attempts to interfere with the natural workings of society.<sup>47</sup> For Spencer, as well as for most of his followers, it was the job of nature, not politics, to bring about the improvement of society, and its method for doing so was to ensure that in a “natural” environment of unbridled competition the least “fit” of society’s members would eventually be eliminated: “The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, to clear the world of them, and make room for better.”<sup>48</sup> (The pseudoscientific character of social Darwinism is especially visible in the use it made of the idea of the “fittest.” William Graham Sumner, for example, the most prominent of Spencer’s followers in America, assumed “the fittest” to be, as one commentator puts it, the frugal, taxpaying, middle-class man who “went quietly about his business, providing for himself and his family without making demands upon the state.”<sup>49</sup> From Darwin’s perspective, of course, ‘fittest’ could only mean ‘most successful at reproducing’.)

The great popularity that social Darwinism enjoyed in the latter decades of the nineteenth century may account for some of the disfavor into which the society-as-organism analogy fell in the twentieth century. As social theorists came to see that Darwinian science did *not* support the views of Spencer and his followers, it no doubt became easier to question as well the basic assumptions that once made those views seem plausible (at least to many). Perhaps for similar reasons, a further pillar of Spencer’s system (and, to a lesser degree, Comte’s) was decisively rejected by the century that followed, namely, the claim that biology, or any of the natural sciences, was an appropriate model for the study of society. The main enduring legacy of nineteenth-century social thought as a whole – that is, apart from *particular* insights of (especially) Marx, Hegel, and Tocqueville – is its insistence on the importance of distinguishing society from the state and of establishing a science of the former that is independent not only of (what later came to be called) “political science” but of traditional political philosophy as well.

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<sup>47</sup> The implications for international policy are apparently no less severe: “A further progress of . . . nature is everywhere manifested in the subjugation of weaker tribes by stronger ones”; Spencer, *CW* 5:316.

<sup>48</sup> Spencer, *CW* 3:379.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), 64.

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## NINETEENTH-CENTURY POLITICAL ECONOMY

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In *The History of Economic Analysis*, Schumpeter argues that the evolution of economic ideas proceeds in jumps rather than in smooth continuities.<sup>1</sup> Periods of consolidation, stagnation, and simple elaboration are followed by periods of progress and revolution in basic economic concepts and models.

While to many Schumpeter's claim of discontinuity will seem too stark, it is in fact an accurate characterization of economics during the period between roughly 1780 and 1870. In that relatively short time frame, economics did jump among radically different visions of the nature of markets, society, and human beings. To give one example, which I will discuss later, whereas the classical economists viewed the economy as a system of relationships between social classes with distinct and competing interests, the neoclassical approach was founded on an image of the economy as a set of exchange relations between independent individuals. These alternative visions had far-reaching implications for their respective views of the nature and limits of markets and the justice (or injustice) of many market transactions.

The nineteenth-century political economists gave differing answers based on their distinct underlying visions and assumptions to the following questions: What is the subject of political economy? What is the relationship between the pursuit of private interest and public good? What is the relationship between the production of wealth and human well-being? What is a fair distribution of the social product? What is the place for state intervention into the economy?

This chapter will discuss the competing answers that were given to these questions, with their implications for our understanding of the development of economic and political thought. However, it must be remembered that the differing visions of the political economists were not views from nowhere: they were, at least to some extent, endogenous. The decline of feudalism, the scientific and industrial revolutions, the Napoleonic Wars, the Enlightenment, the rise of an industrial working class, the event of economic slumps, and the debates over the

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), chap. 1.

Corn Laws gave impetus to varying ways of thinking about human nature and economic order. Ideas that seemed crucial in one period often seemed irrelevant in the next; images that resonated with common sense perceptions of the world could readily crumble in the cauldron of war and economic depression.

At the same time, it is important not to oversimplify the course of economic thought: ideas and values have shaped economic science, but these ideas are not simply responses to empirical facts; economics also inherits problems and ideas from its own history and results. Political economy consists in *both* a method of investigation with an internal logic as well as a set of visions and assumptions, the latter often remaining tacit and unarticulated. But it is chiefly the visions that bear lasting intellectual influence, and these changing visions<sup>2</sup> have led to dramatic discontinuities in the underlying economic logic. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of nineteenth-century political economy was how self-consciously underlying assumptions about human well-being and human nature were often used to shape a sense of market functioning and social order.

#### THE SMITHEAN BACKGROUND: THE REVOLUTION OF LAISSEZ FAIRE

During the second half of the eighteenth century, capitalism began to establish itself in the countryside. Technological innovations (Hargreaves's spinning jenny was invented in 1764 and Arkwright's water frame in 1768) and the resultant rise in agricultural productivity accelerated the expulsion of laborers from the countryside. That process, along with a rise in population, fueled the development of an urban working class. Simultaneously, the Enlightenment along with the invention of the printing press created an intellectual climate of critical inquiry and knowledge dissemination. The economic, cultural, and social preconditions for an industrial revolution were being put in place.

This period also saw the old social order based on hierarchical and fixed status differentials between social groups under pressure from a new way of thinking about social and political relations, based on individual freedom and consent. But how could individual freedom and consent be made compatible with social *order*? Hobbes had earlier argued that only an absolute sovereign with unlimited power

<sup>2</sup> Albert Hirschman recounts the Jewish parable in which the rabbi of Krakow interrupts his prayers with a wail that he has just seen the death of the rabbi of Warsaw two hundred miles away. A few days later some Jews from Krakow travel to Warsaw, where to their surprise they see the Warsaw rabbi in good health. When they return to Krakow, rumors spread among the Krakow rabbi's congregation and there are criticisms and snickering. A few of the rabbi's disciples rush to his defense, claiming that although he was wrong on the details, "Nevertheless, what vision!" Quoted in *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 117.

could secure a stable social order among independent individuals. Adam Smith provided the world with a different answer. A central claim of his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776; the last revised edition appeared in 1784) is that, in the context of market relations, independent individuals would not only produce increased wealth but also create a liberal social order.

Smith's striking innovation was to see the market as a form of *social* organization. He conceived of the market price system not only as a mechanism for facilitating the exchange of goods, but also as a way of imposing orderly rules of behavior without central direction. Moreover, Smith argued that the pursuit of individual self-interest in a market system would not only reward the individual actor, but also produce rewards for all through generating economic growth. Smith essentially offered a theory of unintended consequences, through which the actions of individual self-interested agents unintentionally produce increased wealth. Wealth, in turn, is taken to have political effects, ushering in "order and good government," along with the "liberty and security of individuals."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Smith believed that wealth and the development of the liberal individual mutually support each other and provide checks against centralized despotic authority.

The uncoordinated actions of individuals in a market were taken by Smith to be generally better at producing these results (liberty, security, wealth) than the visible hand of conscious state policies. Smith's fundamental insight – that the market choices made by rational individuals will (under certain conditions) generate efficient outcomes for all – was formalized in the twentieth century by Pareto and Walras. The so-called fundamental theorem of welfare economics states that in a free market world in which everyone can trade everything, the allocation of resources will be Pareto optimal: that is, a state will be reached where no one could be made better off without someone else's being made worse off.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, it is important to distinguish Smith from the conservative economists and abstract methodologists who followed him.<sup>5</sup> We should note at least three qualifications that Smith imposed on the idea of a completely self-regulating social order produced by markets.

First, Smith recognized that a stable political and social order could not be produced by self-interest alone – society must also draw on moral resources, certain social sentiments that would channel self-interest away from short-term gain, collusion, and cheating. The presence or absence of these sentiments profoundly influences the direction of economic life. "It is chiefly from this regard to the

<sup>3</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976), bk. III, chap. 4, 412.

<sup>4</sup> See Mark Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 5th ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 577ff.

<sup>5</sup> See Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

sentiments of mankind, that we pursue riches and avoid poverty,” Smith wrote in the *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, stressing our desire to be held in esteem by others.<sup>6</sup> While Smith certainly believed that these moral sentiments were compatible with markets and would often be reinforced by them, he did not believe that markets could completely supply them. He was well aware, for example, of the need to counteract the tendency of the capitalists to collude to push up prices and depress wages – if not by opposing moral sentiment, then by state intervention. He also knew that labor markets could erode these moral sentiments in the least skilled workers, and that state intervention in education was therefore necessary.<sup>7</sup>

Second, Smith recognized the existence of certain public goods – such as education, road building, a national defense – that were in everyone’s interest to have, but in no one individual’s interest to create. If left to markets alone, Smith recognized, such goods would not be created. The “invisible hand of the market,” a phrase Smith only used on three occasions,<sup>8</sup> would not seamlessly produce order and growth with respect to many kinds of goods; nor would it operate in many kinds of markets. State action was needed to supplement market order, and *The Wealth of Nations* devoted considerable space to detailing the role of government in providing such goods and regulating such markets.

Third, Smith recognized that markets had ambivalent social and political effects: in particular, markets push forward the development of the division of labor, which in turn produces not only growth but also a one-sided worker incapable of taking part in social decision making. The growth of the division of labor deprives workers of their “intellectual, social and martial virtues.” In the pin-making factory, Smith detailed how workers spent their waking hours focusing on one small facet of pin production. He wrote regarding such a worker: “Of the great and extensive interests of his country he is altogether incapable of judging.”<sup>9</sup> This striking admission of the limited nature of industrial workers in a capitalist economy was later developed by Hegel and Marx in their ideas of the alienation of labor. Thus, while Smith defended commercial society, he was very attuned to the problematic circumstance of workers within that society.

Smith gave impetus to a view of a laissez-faire economy and society, but this was only one strand in his more complex thought. Indeed, Smith bequeathed to nineteenth-century economic thought a series of ideas that were spun out in

<sup>6</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982), 50.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 782ff.

<sup>8</sup> See Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 116. The phrase itself appears only once in *The Wealth of Nations* in the context of a discussion of international trade.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 782.



very different directions. It is thus not surprising that both the classical and the neoclassical economists saw in Smith their inspiration.

A central concern of *The Wealth of Nations* was the distribution of the social product among the three great social classes – capitalists, landlords, and workers – in the form of profits, rents, and wages. The relationships among these classes and their behavior in the market are central to Smith's theory of economic growth. Yet *The Wealth of Nations* suggests two different theories of the contribution of these different classes to the production of wealth, related in turn to two ideas Smith propounds about the value of commodities: a cost of production theory (developed by Ricardo and Marx) and a subjective welfare theory (developed by Bentham, Walras, and Jevons).

According to Smith's cost of production theory, the ultimate factor determining the relative prices of goods is the amount of labor the good "commands." In an economy in which there was no capital accumulation and no privately appropriated land, this would be equal to the labor embodied in the goods.<sup>10</sup> Under those conditions, the whole product of labor would belong to the laborer. But once production is no longer wholly owned and controlled by the workers, the price of commodities must include profit and rent as well as wages. The price of the commodity will then be determined by the sum of wages and profit and rent paid to produce it. To express this in terms of cost of production, we must think of profits and rents as residues: since labor commanded is seen as the primary source of value, profits and rents are not determined independently. In this theory, the price of a good can be specified independently of individual choices and psychological factors, on the basis of objective technical relations holding among the conditions of production, wages, and profits. For each commodity, its normal price is governed by its normal costs of production (except for goods produced under monopoly conditions).

*The Wealth of Nations* also contains suggestions of an "additive" way of thinking about a good's value, in which the price of commodities is determined by the incomes – in the form of wages, profits, and rents – paid to produce it. According to this theory, prices are determined by the supply and demand of the different "factors" of production. This additive theory provides the foundations for a theory in which individual buyers and sellers of goods decide on the quantity to demand or to supply on the basis of a given price. This theory requires individualist foundations, and those who adopted this theory stressed Smith's comments about the "toil and trouble" of labor and the pains people took to avoid it. The additive theory thus ultimately gave rise to a theory of subjective individual utility or welfare as the basis of price. Later economists seized on – and

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 67.

amplified – the idea that an “invisible hand” of the market connected each individual’s utility with a production system that produced the goods demanded with maximal efficiency at the lowest possible prices.

Both theories are parts of Adam Smith’s thought, and they issue in two very different directions: one direction in which the concepts of costs of production, social surplus, and the role of the various social classes are fundamental, and another direction in which the ideas of the individual economic actor and competitive equilibrium are fundamental. During the nineteenth century this second direction of Smith’s work would eclipse the first and become seen as fundamental to his economics, and indeed to economics as a whole. This is unfortunate, as the more “macroeconomic” aspects of Smith’s thinking contained key insights. For example, Smith was quite critical of the tendency of capitalists to collude and use their power to influence the government to depress wages.<sup>11</sup> He saw the marketplace as a political and cultural as well as an economic institution, where differing interests wielded power and where some groups were able to extract from others an unearned surplus. *The Wealth of Nations* is preoccupied with political and cultural factors affecting commerce, including greed, the delusions of the merchants about their own interests, the drive to monopoly, and the degradation of the workers. Markets might indeed generate social harmony, but only under certain conditions and with certain restrictions on market activity in place.

Smith also made an important contribution to economic thought with his observation that some types of exchanges, for example, in labor markets, have constitutive effects on their participants. He worried about the “alienation” of workers in modern factories, recognizing that the functioning of labor markets inevitably raises questions relevant to the structure of public life, in a way that the functioning of a market in apples does not.<sup>12</sup> The classical economists saw the marketplace as a political and cultural as well as an economic institution, where differing interests wielded power and where some types of exchanges shaped the participants.

Smith celebrated the freedom to buy and sell not only as an impetus to economic growth and wealth, but also as a form of emancipation from political oppression. *The Wealth of Nations* should be read not so much as a theory of commerce, but as a theory of liberal social order. Smith argued that markets support the production of wealth, security, rule of law, and the pursuit of personal interest over communal passion. Smith’s confidence that markets produce *liberal* social order and are a critical check on despotism must now be qualified by

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 157–8.

<sup>12</sup> See Debra Satz, “The Limits of the Market: A Map of the Major Debates,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, eds. J. Smelser and Paul Baltes (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001).

twentieth-century experience of market dictatorships such as in Pinochet's Chile and Nazi Germany; nonetheless, such confidence was crucial to the Smithian understanding and defense of markets. Indeed, Marx's disagreement with Smith concerns fundamentally the question of whether capitalism has precisely the empirical effects Smith propounds. Writing three-quarters of a century after *The Wealth of Nations*, Marx could not share in Smith's more optimistic vision of a liberal capitalist society founded on the freedom and equality of individuals.

Ultimately, Smith's insights and economic perspective cannot easily be summed up by a single principle of free exchange by consenting adults. Smith saw the market as a complex heterogeneous institution, putting people in different kinds of relations with each other for different purposes. From this broader perspective, not only efficiency but also the effects of a particular market on the structure of political power and on human development are relevant to its assessment. Unfortunately, this perspective has been largely ignored in contemporary economic thought.

#### THE POST-SMITHEAN CONSERVATIVE ORTHODOXY

The forty years between the first publication of *The Wealth of Nations* and Ricardo's *Principles* was a period of enthusiasm and hope for the middle classes of England and France, tempered by the traumatic course of the French Revolution. Adam Smith's theory of economic growth – stressing capital accumulation and the growth of the division of labor – seemed to promise a world of increasing wealth, greater security, and individual freedom.

Jean-Baptiste Say (1767–1832) went beyond Adam Smith in his attempt to justify a laissez-faire philosophy. Although Smith argued that the self-interest of the capitalists would generally lead to an efficient resource allocation, he was aware that the self-regulating market faced, at times, internal obstacles from the capitalists themselves. He was also dimly conscious of the possibility of modern economies' reaching a "stationary state," in which profits might then decline as a result of an excess supply of capital in all the industries.

Say argued that capitalist markets produced not only growth but also equity. Land, labor, and capital each are assumed by Say to receive a price equal to their productive contribution – a striking departure from Smith's emphasis on the collusion of the industrialists, the frivolity and wastefulness of the landlords, and the illegitimate poverty of the workers. Say also tried to demonstrate the impossibility of generalized excess supply of goods. This demonstration is the famous "Say's law of markets," according to which supply always creates its own demand. The basic idea of Say's law is that in an economy with an advanced division of labor, production not only increases the supply of goods but also, by virtue of the

associated cost payments to the factors of production, creates the demand to purchase those goods. While it is possible for one industry to produce “too much” of a specific good, an entire economy cannot do so, because aggregate supply and aggregate demand are not independent of each other. Say’s law tells us that it is impossible for all goods to be produced in relative excess: it thus excludes the possibility of crises or general gluts of goods and services. Of course, Say’s law depends on the assumption that all incomes are entirely and immediately spent – a fact that was not lost on John Maynard Keynes, who made an assault on Say’s law central to his own *General Theory*.<sup>13</sup>

Say’s optimism about the full production equilibrium tendencies of the market was not universally shared. For example, Say’s law was the complete antithesis of the pessimistic arguments of Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), who instead argued that the process of capital accumulation would lead inherently to the overproduction of commodities and economic stagnation.

While Malthus is generally known for his theory of overpopulation, he is also an early advocate of the theory of underconsumption, associated in different forms with the writings of both Marx and Keynes. The gist of Malthus’s underconsumption argument is this: workers and landowners spend almost all of their incomes purchasing consumer goods. Therefore, wages and rents are equal to effective demand. On the other hand, the capitalists’ profits are saved and invested. If the profit share increases with respect to the shares of wages, then the labor commanded by the goods will increase over the amount commanded by wages. This means that the incomes paid to the workers will not be enough to generate demand sufficient to realize the value of the goods produced by them. According to Malthus, this would lead to a lack of aggregate demand, a glut in goods produced that could not be purchased. Malthus thus implicitly disputes Say’s law of markets and argues for a deficiency of effective demand in the context of capital investment, an idea that is neglected in economic thought until Keynes takes it up more than a century later.

Malthus achieved fame not as the originator of a theory of general overproduction, but for his principle of overpopulation. Malthus’s *Essay on the Principle of Population as It Effects the Future Improvement of Society* (1798) was intended as a refutation of the Enlightenment’s idea of the perfectibility of human society by legislation and education. It also thereby strengthened the case for laissez faire: social intervention tended to exacerbate the fundamental problem of overpopulation. The “Malthusian population principle” asserts that while population increases geometrically, the food supply can increase only arithmetically. Given that the lower classes were incapable of using restraint to avert the catastrophic effects of

<sup>13</sup> There is considerable controversy about the meaning and formulation of Say’s law.

natural laws, they were doomed to poverty and premature death. (Interestingly, Malthus – a conservative pastor – condemned contraception as a vice!) Malthus also argued that any increase in the wages of the poor above subsistence would stimulate increased human reproduction, which in turn would lead to an over-supply of labor, which would again drive workers' wages back to subsistence levels. Neither charity nor social policy could save the poor from their fate. It was after reading Malthus that Carlyle coined the term “dismal science” to refer to economics.

#### DIMINISHING RETURNS AND THE THEORY OF LAND RENTS

From the perspective of nineteenth-century political economy, Malthus's population principle is important primarily for two of its by-products: the theory of diminishing returns and the theory of ground rent. Malthus developed these ideas more or less simultaneously with David Ricardo, Sir Edward West, and Robert Torrens in 1815.<sup>14</sup> Smith's rather negative view of landowners in *The Wealth of Nations* – as making essentially no contribution to productive development – anticipated these ideas.

Malthus argued that improvements in technology could not overcome the limitations in available land: there were inevitable “diminishing returns” in agriculture. According to the principle of diminishing returns, the improvement of cultivation becomes progressively more expensive, in that equal inputs of labor and capital applied to land yield diminishing outputs. These diminishing outputs are then reflected in the rising costs of agricultural products such as grain and corn. Malthus believed that this decline in the rate of returns was true whether the labor and capital were “intensively” applied to lands already under cultivation or “extensively” applied to new and inferior lands.

Assuming this law holds, Malthus inferred from it that the price of land is regulated by the least favorable circumstance under which production is carried on. In more modern language, prices are determined by marginal cost, equal to the cost of labor and capital to the farmer cultivating no-rent land at the intensive or the extensive margin. When increased demand leads producers to cultivate inferior land, the price of agricultural goods will rise, because the costs of labor and capital employed in producing the marginal unit of these goods will rise. But the price of these goods across different circumstances will be the same, whether obtained on more fertile land (and thus with less labor and capital inputs) or less fertile land. Malthus and the others argued that, given the assumption that capital and labor both obtain their marginal product – that is, that they are paid

<sup>14</sup> Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 75ff.

proportionately to their added productive contribution – there is a surplus that will fall to the landlord holding the superior land, paid in the form of rent. This conclusion had critical significance for the development of economic thought in the nineteenth century, shattering the laissez-faire hope that markets could generate social harmony among the three distinct classes.

#### THE RICARDIAN ATTACK ON THE LANDLORD'S UNEARNED RENT

In the decades following *The Wealth of Nations*, England had become increasingly divided between the interests of the rising industrialists and the entrenched landed aristocracy. Their struggles over the political organization of society and its future were reflected in the debates surrounding the Corn Laws in England. Passed in 1816, these laws were essentially tariffs designed to protect landowners from foreign competition. The Napoleonic Wars, by drastically reducing the imports of food supplies, had provoked an increase in the price of cereals, and in particular of corn. The prices of manufacturing goods had increased less sharply during the same period. By 1813, a bushel of wheat sold for a price equal to almost twice a worker's weekly wage!

The Corn Laws, by putting up protectionist barriers for agricultural goods, allowed for the maintenance of high land rents to the detriment of profits in manufacturing goods. Higher grain prices meant higher wages, since the price of food largely determined what the industrialists needed to pay for labor. Higher grain prices also prevented the industrialists from taking advantage of their higher productivity over their foreign competitors. It took the industrialists thirty years to repeal the Corn Laws, but Ricardian economic theory delivered the decisive theoretical blow to landlord hegemony. Ricardo also laid the foundation for a theory of competitive advantage and, in the socialist incarnation of his theory, provided the basis for a full-scale assault on private property in land.

Ricardo (1772–1823) argued that given the limited amount of land suitable for cultivation, the Corn Laws forced national agriculture to increase its productivity by intensifying national investment in agriculture. This in turn would slow capital accumulation, as the savings necessary to finance investment come from profits. Landowners, although they have very high incomes, do not save and invest in capital accumulation because they are not generally motivated to increase their wealth. Moreover, drawing on the principle of decreasing returns, Ricardo argued that there would eventually be catastrophic results from the decreasing returns to agriculture. Ricardian economics aimed to demonstrate that the interests of the landlords were antithetical to industrial progress and the wealth of the

nation: “the interest of the landlord is always opposed to the interest of every other class in the community.”<sup>15</sup>

Like Adam Smith, Ricardo thought of rent as payment for the “use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil.”<sup>16</sup> Ricardian rent is, therefore, restricted to “land” and does not include any interest on capital improvements such as buildings. Along with Malthus, Ricardo thought that rent arises for two reasons. First, if land is homogeneous, rent arises from the scarcity of supply. Rent is then the difference between the product of all capital and labor and the product of the final inputs at the intensive margin. Second, if land differs in quality, then the scarcity of acres of a particular quality gives rise to differential rents.

Rent, on this view, is not a cost of production – it does not enter into price – and is not payment for using up resources. In Ricardo’s words, “corn is not high because a rent is paid, but rent is paid because corn is high.”<sup>17</sup> Rent thus bore no relationship to the landlord’s costs. Nor did it help produce wealth or stimulate productivity. Rather it grew as nature’s bounty became scarcer, driving up the marginal price of agricultural production and hence the surplus to those owners who held the superior land.

It is a small step from these observations to the conclusion that ground rent was completely unearned and that its confiscation by the state would make no difference to production. Indeed, ground rent was a form of unearned surplus par excellence, completely unjustified when viewed through the lens of a Lockean theory of property rights. Unlike workers and capitalists, landlords failed the Lockean criteria of justified private appropriation: they neither improved the situation of others by their appropriation of land nor expended any effort or labor of their own. But Ricardo did not himself draw the full and radical political implications of his diagnosis.<sup>18</sup>

Ricardo’s long-term prognosis was pessimistic – rising rents were inevitable as population increased and land became more scarce – and eventually a stationary state would be reached where total wages equal total product minus rent, and profits will be reduced to zero. In the short term, however, Ricardo believed, a repeal of the protectionist Corn Laws would lower rents to landlords by taking out of use less fertile lands at home. Competition over agricultural goods would further help the industrialists, by lowering the wages they would have to pay to

<sup>15</sup> David Ricardo, *An Essay on Profits* (London, 1815), 21.

<sup>16</sup> David Ricardo, *On The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, ed. Piero Sraffa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 69.

<sup>17</sup> Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy*, 74.

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent discussion of the implications of Ricardian rent theory for American progressive legal and social thought, see Barbara Fried, *The Progressive Assault on Laissez Faire: Robert Hale and the First Law and Economics Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

workers. The surplus profit this enabled would then be reinvested. But, in the long run, others recognized the significant upshot of Ricardian theory: the landlord's ownership and control of land threatened to derail economic growth and progress.

The radical conclusion that ground rent was wholly unjustified was developed by Ricardo's disciple James Mill and his more famous son, John Stuart, who advocated taxing away all increments in rent from some current base year. The latter Mill extended Ricardo's observation that agricultural rents were unjustified to urban rents. Since the short-term Ricardian solution for agricultural rents – capturing the fruits of fertile lands in other countries – was not available for urban rents, Mill focused on depriving urban landlords of their benefits by taxation; Mill also advocated taxing inheritance more generally.<sup>19</sup>

Henry George was perhaps the most famous advocate of a land tax. In *Progress and Poverty* (1879) George proposed the confiscation of all rents in a “single tax,” which would be used to eliminate poverty and economic crises due to land speculation. For George, the landowners were the central drain on economic progress and the main source of poverty, forcing the worker to spend all his wages on food. Not only would taxing land remove the need for all other taxes, but also it would raise wages, increase profits, and end the landowners' negative influence on politics. Furthermore, George sounded a Lockean theme implicit in Ricardo's earlier denunciation of the landlords: Why should someone receive benefits without having made any contribution? Why should mere ownership suffice as grounds for reward? George seized on the normative significance of the idea of rents as reflecting only nature's scarcity and not any cost returned to the landlord. But this idea has further application: it raises the possibility that other activities might also generate rents above and beyond their contribution to social production. This idea was seized on by the utopian socialists, by Karl Marx, as well as by some of the early proponents of the “marginal” revolution in economics. *Progress and Poverty* itself was a best-selling book and turned George into a national figure.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Ricardian economics was its measure of value. Developing the first strand of Adam Smith's theory of value – the cost of production strand – Ricardo formulated a new theory of value, completely rejecting the additive theory of price. Profits, he claimed, are a residue of the true cost of production, which he now (at least in some texts) identified with *embodied* labor, the quantity of labor embodied in a commodity's production. In particular, Ricardo tried to show – through a simple corn model – that the rate of profit is determined only by the technical conditions of producing wage

<sup>19</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), ed. Donald Winch (Middlesex, England: Pelican, 1970), bk. II.



goods. Through this model, Ricardo believed that he had shown that the productivity of agricultural labor governs the rate of return on capital, as well as secular changes in distributive shares between labor and capital. But he soon realized that his labor theory of value was inadequate to explain relative prices when there are significant differences in capital intensity between industries. For example, a general wage increase tends to raise the price of goods and services produced by labor-intensive industries relatively to those produced by capital-intensive industries. Although the quantities of labor in products across these industries remain unchanged, their relative prices are altered by changes in income distribution between capital and labor. The labor theory of value that Ricardo put forward was developed later by Marx, who tried to redress this difficulty. But by the time Marx was writing, political economy had already begun to separate into two very different streams. An anti-Ricardian reaction was forming, focused on discrediting Ricardo's labor theory of value and explaining value in subjective rather than cost of production terms. Important figures in this attack were Nassau Senior (1790–1864), Richard Whately (1787–1863), and William Foster Lloyd (1794–1852). Whereas the Ricardian socialists argued that labor was the only source of value and profits were, therefore, based on illegitimate exploitation, Senior expounded the “abstinence” theory of profits, wherein they appeared as a reward for the sacrifice involved in deferring consumption. Senior thereby also placed the idea of utility at the center of his theory of value.

#### NINETEENTH-CENTURY UTILITARIANISM

The period from 1850 to 1870 has been referred to as the “Age of Capital,” a time when capitalism attempted to take possession of the reins of political power and remove the last obstacles to its ascendancy. The worker's movement was temporarily dormant, following its violent repression in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1848. This was also a period of “complacency” within mainstream economic thought.<sup>20</sup>

The writings of John Stuart Mill (1806–73) dominated economics during this time. In 1848 – the same year that Marx published the *Communist Manifesto* – Mill produced his two-volume *Principles of Political Economy*, written as a comprehensive survey of the field, drawing on the works of Smith, Ricardo, and Malthus. For the last half of the nineteenth century, Mill's *Principles* was the undisputed bible of economists – the basic textbook used in American and British universities.

From the standpoint of the development of economic thought, what is perhaps most interesting about Mill's *Principles* is that it is the last attempt to hold

<sup>20</sup> Phyllis Deane, *The Evolution of Economic Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 94.

together the two largely incompatible strands of classical political economy: the macroeconomic theory of surplus based on relationships among the three social classes under given conditions of production and the microeconomic theory of individualistic competitive equilibrium. After Mill, these two strands separated completely. Mill's work thus appears as a critical crossroads in economics.

Mill was, of course, a utilitarian. As a utilitarian he believed that the general welfare – understood as the maximal happiness of the greatest number of people – was the only legitimate goal of social policy. This belief, in conjunction with his insistence that the content of happiness was not a matter of subjective individual opinion and that there were declining marginal returns to happiness – led him to advocate departures from *laissez faire*, including labor legislation aimed at regulating the length of the working day and progressive taxation.

In the *Principles*, Mill turns away from the Ricardian labor theory of value. To begin with, Mill argues that labor is only one of the necessary inputs into production: capital is also needed. Thus far, Ricardo might have agreed, since he viewed “profit” as a part of the value of a good to be set aside and reinvested. But he would have rejected the idea of profit as a *creator* of value, as a separate and independent input into its determination. As we have seen, for Ricardo, profit was a residue and not an independent factor that went into creating new value. In effect, Mill used a Ricardian cost of production language to expound a fundamentally anti-Ricardian idea: that profit was a reward for abstinence, as Senior had argued.

Although with this latter idea, Mill has clear links to the tradition of neoclassical economics, he also shares with the classical economists a vision of the social injustices wrought by the unequal bargaining positions of labor, land, and capital. In this sense, he accepts their macroeconomic picture of actual economies as permeated by power and as shapers of human freedom as well as human coercion. Indeed, he looks forward to a society in which the power of the capitalist and landlord has been diminished and in which no one earns more than the product of his own labor. But unlike the classical economists, Mill did not believe that the structure of economic production generated *laws* for the distribution of the social product. Rejecting the cost of production theory of value, Mill believed that the conditions of production could be wholly separated from the question of distribution.<sup>21</sup> Society could, on Mill's view, choose to redistribute the social product according to its own norms – there were no laws governing how a society shared its wealth, no underlying production relations justifying one system of distribution over another. This alleged separability of the productive aspect of an economy from its distributive aspect would be attacked by Marx, who argued

<sup>21</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 349ff.

that such neat separation was impossible. In particular, Marx argued that and that the underlying structure of capitalist production was closely linked to its system of distribution and that a capitalist system was impossible if capitalists did not reap at least part of social production in the form of profit.<sup>22</sup>

It is worth noting that although Mill separated questions of production from questions of distribution, he believed that both questions were within the purview of economics. By the end of the century, the first wave of marginalist theorists would argue that not only were the two realms completely separate, but that considerations of distribution should be banished from the realm of economics altogether.

Mill was a consequentialist, and when it came to evaluating different systems of production, he looked to the effects of these different systems on human well-being. Departing from the laissez-faire perspective of many of his contemporaries, he believed that the choice between a socialist economy with collective ownership and a capitalist economy with private ownership of production was still an open question. While he celebrated the effects of the decentralized market on human freedom, he was also sympathetic to the idea that hierarchical structures of work and economic decision making inhibited the self-development of workers.<sup>23</sup> His economic model predicted a general raising of wages, until at last a plateau is realized in which society can turn its attention away from growth to focus on the questions of liberty and well-being. He believed that at this point, associations of workers could displace the hierarchies that subordinate workers to owners. In this sense, he can rightly be viewed as one of the first Fabian socialists.

#### THE MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS: MARXISM

Like Mill, Karl Marx (1818–83) inherited the theories of the great political economists: Smith and Ricardo. The footnotes to his great treatise, *Capital*, are littered with references and extensive discussions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical political economy. Marx sought to build on and extend the classical political economists' basic insights into the process of social production. In particular, he accepted Ricardo's labor theory of value and his analyses of the behavior of social classes as fundamental. But he approached their economic theories from the perspective of Hegelian philosophical thought. In particular, rather than thinking of Smith's and Ricardo's economic laws as natural and eternal, Marx

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (1867) (New York: Vintage, 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 123, 128ff.

holds that strictly speaking they are true only within a capitalist society. Capital itself is not a technological or natural category: it is a social category. In the context of historicizing political economy, Marx sets himself the project of working out more fully than either Smith or Ricardo the “laws of motion” of capitalist society, its laws of origin, development, and evolution.

### *The Project of Historicizing Political Economy*

In one sense, the classical political economists were already aware of the historical nature of the economies they studied: their discussions evidence a rich understanding of the way that contingent institutions and events shaped human and market behavior. Consider, for example, Smith’s recognition that the nature and characteristics of workers are both shaped by the modern division of labor. Indeed, Smith hypothesized that much of human inequality was the *result* and not the *cause* of market differentiation.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Marx believed that the earlier economists had not consistently applied their historical insights, and that when it came to understanding the workings of capitalism, they tended to confuse natural and social causes. Capitalism was, Marx argued, no mere product of nature: Adam Smith’s market exchangers were the creation of a long historical process. Capitalism’s origin was the product of a variety of social as well as technical economic factors: in particular, it was built on class conflict and bloody revolution against the older feudal order. Moreover, capital itself is not merely a technical set of production conditions but a *social* relationship. Through their private ownership of the means of production, capitalist owners are able to exercise power over workers; only by virtue of such power, Marx argued, do means of production turn into capital. Marx’s story of “unhappy Mr. Peel” nicely illustrates this point:

A Mr. Peel ... took with him from England to the Swan River district of Western Australia means of subsistence and of production to the amount of \$50,000. This Mr. Peel even had the foresight to bring besides 3,000 persons of the working class, men, women and children. Once he arrived at his destination, Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river. Unhappy Mr. Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English relations of production to Swan River.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, capital can only exist where workers have no other option but to sell their labor power. If given the choice – as in Western Australia – workers are more likely to acquire their own land rather than work for the capitalists in a factory. Marx’s parable of Mr. Peel thus reveals the central (and historically

<sup>24</sup> See Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 933.

created) feature of a capitalist society: the widespread existence of formally free labor. Whereas Smith viewed markets as an important sphere of human liberty, Marx believed that workers were not substantively free agents, since in a capitalist society they are dependent on employment (by the capitalists) to survive. They are “free” from the means of production and thus “free” from their own means of subsistence as well as free to move among different sectors of the economy. Later, I will explore the ramifications of this idea of formally free labor for Marx’s analyses of wages, profits, and exploitation, as well as his criticism of capitalism.

Marx’s interests in political economy grew out of his critical reexamination of Hegelian philosophy. Whereas Hegelian idealism had focused on the role of thought in shaping the world and society, Marx drew the conclusion that world and society also importantly shaped thought. He turned the Hegelian system “on its head,” inverting the relationship between thought and world and developing his own theory of historical materialism. But despite this intellectual revolution of a Hegelian world turned upside down, it is important to recognize how much Marx’s economic theory remained indebted to Hegel. Like Hegel, and unlike the tradition of *laissez faire*, Marx emphasized that conflict and not harmony was a key to understanding the workings of economic social forms. This emphasis on progress through conflict shaped Marx’s view of markets, history, capitalism, and human nature itself.

Marx drew from Hegel the idea that human beings change themselves and the world through activity in the world. But whereas Hegel saw this practical activity as stimulated primarily by thought, Marx saw it as occurring through human social production, through our socially organized labor. Through their labor, human beings transform nature and simultaneously transform themselves. This process of transformation through labor is potentially liberatory: labor can change nature and make it suit human purposes. Yet, capitalism constrains this liberatory potential: under capitalism, workers make themselves as one-sided, limited, and exploited beings. Bringing together Adam Smith’s insights on the low wages and degraded condition of workers with Hegel’s theory of alienation, Marx sought to demonstrate how capitalism alienated workers not only from the products and wealth they produced, but also from their own human nature.

For Marx, capitalism is inseparable from alienated human labor. It is also inseparable from the exploitation of the working class. Marx develops the labor theory of value found in Smith and especially in Ricardo to argue for the inevitable exploitation of labor, as well as to reveal capitalism’s underlying laws of economic development.

If, as Ricardo argued, labor was the sole determinant of the value of a good, what was the source of the capitalist’s profit? Rejecting the idea that profit was a

result of cheating or mere luck in exchanging, Marx argued that the answer lies in the dual nature of human labor. As a commodity, the value of human labor power is determined as any other commodity: by the labor time needed to produce it, that is, by the labor time needed to produce the wage goods that are needed to maintain workers. Workers – who under capitalism own only their labor power – bring it to the market to sell. But while the buyer of labor power buys labor at its exchange value, he acquires its use value – that is, the capitalist buys the right to use the worker's labor during a certain period. During the working day, the employer is able to use the worker's labor to produce goods that have more value than the worker's labor. So long as the use of labor generates a surplus over its exchange value, the owner reaps a surplus value. Surplus value is the secret of profit, and surplus labor is the secret of surplus value. Profit is solely a function of the employment of labor.<sup>26</sup>

Exploitation is revealed by the existence of surplus value and profit. Capitalism is the unjustified appropriation of other people's labor by those who own the means of production. Marx further argued that capitalists could increase surplus value in two ways: by lengthening the working day – absolute surplus value – or by raising the productivity of labor and thus lessening the time needed to produce wage goods – relative surplus value. The frugal entrepreneur of Nassau Senior and the innovative entrepreneur of Joseph Schumpeter appear in Marx's writings as "Mr. Moneybags," who must use his control over the means of production to make a profit – without which he could not survive in the competitive market.<sup>27</sup> Profit – or rather the extraction of surplus value – is thus revealed as the true aim of capitalist production; production to meet human needs occurs only as a by-product of the capitalist's main drive. Maldistribution of wealth is an inevitable effect of capitalist property relations. This underlying relation between wages and profits is the source of social conflict, as well as the engine of capitalist accumulation and growth.

On the basis of the labor theory of value, Marx also argued that there was a tendency of the rate of profit to fall and a trade cycle to keep the economy in a state of disequilibrium. Marx believed that if wages increased, investment would be discouraged. This would reduce aggregate demand and falling market prices. As prices fell with aggregate output, the average rate of profit would also decline. But the fall in demand would also provoke a decrease in the demand for labor and thus a fall in wages. As the crisis diminished, inefficient firms would be waylaid, the rate of profit would rise again, and the prices of wages would again rise, beginning another cycle. But in each successive wave of the cycle, as machines

<sup>26</sup> See Marx's discussion in *Capital*, chap. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 278–9.

tend more and more to displace labor, the amount of value produced is falling, and the rate of profit must fall as well.

Marx recognized that the preceding argument depends on the assumption – shared by Ricardo – that there are no differences in the ratio of capital to labor across different industries, so that relative prices correspond to relative values. But Marx knew this assumption was incorrect, and in the second and third volumes of *Capital* we can find his attempts to transform values into prices and thus carry the labor theory of value to its logical conclusion.

Marx's attempt to get from embodied labor to relative prices – to solve the “transformation problem” – has largely been acknowledged to be unsuccessful. If the labor theory of value is unsuccessful, then so must be the preceding arguments that rely on it: the arguments about surplus value and the declining rate of profit. Marx's own formulation of a cost of production theory of value has been largely abandoned, although in the twentieth century Piero Sraffa revived a Ricardian cost of production theory that can serve many (although not all) Marxist purposes.<sup>28</sup>

However, it may be that many of Marx's criticisms of capitalism survive that failure. Marx condemned capitalism not only as based on the appropriation of workers' surplus labor, but also for its inhibiting of human development, failing to utilize increasing labor productivity rationally by generating more leisure time for all, and structurally subordinating the interests of the many to the interests of a few. Like Smith and Ricardo, Marx focused on the distribution of the social product among labor, capital, and land and like them he offers us a theory of how and why capitalism disadvantages workers, abandoning their needs when these conflict with the imperative of increasing profit. Many of these criticisms will continue to resonate with those who remain unconvinced by his labor theory of value.

#### THE MARGINAL REVOLUTION AND THE RISE OF NEOCLASSICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

In the 1870s a dramatic shift in economics took place, which led to the virtual abandonment of the cost of production theory of the classical economists, as well as displacing their earlier emphasis on social distribution and economic growth.

Three figures were central to the marginal revolution in economics: William Stanley Jevons (1835–82), Carl Menger (1840–1921), and Leon Walras (1834–1910). Although these thinkers had many important differences, together they

<sup>28</sup> See Piero Sraffa, *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

initiated a new line of thinking in economics. At the center of this new approach to economics stands the problem of the allocation of *given* scarce resources among alternative uses. Indeed, analysis of that problem becomes the defining feature of economics. As Jevons puts it:

The problem of economics may be stated thus: Given a certain population, with various goods and other sources of materials: required, the mode of employing their labour which will maximize the utility of the produce.<sup>29</sup>

Economics is now to be conceived as an inquiry into the maximal allocation of given resources under conditions of scarcity. The basic idea behind marginalism is itself rather simple, and indeed, we have already encountered it in Ricardo's analysis of ground rent. Assume that individuals seek to deploy their resources to satisfy their wants maximally. At the optimal position, marginal prices will then be equalized: that is to say, the gains to be derived from deploying a resource for one use will exactly equal the losses involved in withdrawing it from another alternative use. Wherever diminishing returns are obtainable from putting a given unit of a resource to a particular use, the optimal result is obtained when values are equalized at the margin. Marginalism thus allowed economists to explain prices in common terms, something that the cost of production theory had failed to achieve.

The marginalists were able to provide a mathematically elegant explanation of the determination of prices in a market system. More importantly, they were able to show that a system of perfect competition would lead to an equimarginal distribution of resources. Formalizing and extending Smith's more inchoate insight of the invisible hand, the marginalists demonstrated that under certain assumptions, rational individuals would behave in a way that led to the maximal satisfaction of their preferences. This idea – that a market order produces maximal benefits *for all* as an unintended consequence of its operations – was of the greatest importance for twentieth-century political thought and practice. It was also, as we have seen, both a development and a distortion of the more modest claims that Adam Smith had made concerning the market. It overlooked his earlier insistence that the market itself is a cultural and political institution permeated by power relations and that it requires the enforcement of laws and norms for its success.

Many contemporary critics believe that the marginalists delivered a decisive blow to the cost of production theory of the classical economists, and to the theory of exploitation that the Ricardian socialists and Marx erected upon it. By claiming that the value of all goods and services reflected their utility to

<sup>29</sup> W. S. Jevons, *The Theory of Political Economy* (1871), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 267.



marginal purchasers and not their cost of production, marginalism appeared to refute definitively the classical economists' labor theory of value. But it could also be claimed, perhaps with greater plausibility, that the marginalists did not so much refute the classical economists as change the subject.

The marginalists' approach to economics has several distinctive features that taken together transformed economic theory:

First, marginalism enabled economists to unify their approach across distinct kinds of markets – consumer markets, labor markets, capital markets, and markets in land – markets that the classical economists had treated independently. The marginalists linked all markets in a single system of equations, culminating in Walras's construction of a general equilibrium for the entire market economy.

Second, by abstracting away from the features of particular kinds of markets, the marginalists also abstracted away from the social relations in which markets are situated. The analysis of the social relations among the three great social classes – a focus that had preoccupied the classical political economists – became viewed as endogenous to economics. Indeed, within the marginalist framework there is little room for ideas of social class or power.

Third, the marginalists were able to reformulate the puzzle of value that had so vexed the classical economists. Abandoning the cost of production theory, the marginalists simply defined price in terms of marginal utility. In dividing resources among competing resources, efficient allocation will equalize returns at the margins. Whereas the classical economists treated the three different components of production as fundamentally distinct, the new economics treated all factors in the same way. Factors were rewarded because they were scarce relative to consumers' wants for the products that factors could produce. The marginalists thus derived not only prices from their principle, but also allocation: both factor and product prices were to be explained by marginal utility. But this principle unified different domains at the cost of narrowing its focus: it can explain distribution and price only at a fixed point in time, on the basis of given "factors." This approach contrasts sharply with the classical economists' concern with the *dynamic* aspects of an economy. The classical economists investigated the possibilities for growth or stagnation, under the assumptions of changing population, expanding human wants, and the changing quantity and quality of resources. The marginalist approach simply ignored the questions posed by such long-term analyses.

Fourth, the early marginalists took from the utilitarians the idea that a rational individual seeks to maximize his utility. But their theory of utility traces back ultimately to Jeremy Bentham and not John Stuart Mill. Like Bentham, and unlike Mill, the early marginalist theorists held that utility is subjective; it is up to the individual alone – so long as he is properly informed and rational – to determine the value of the different aims for which his resources may be deployed.

An immediate consequence of this is that subjective values are now shifted outside the province of economics, which must remain silent about people's market choices. Here, too, the contrast with the classical political economists could not be greater.

Marginalism achieved its generality and synthesis only by narrowing its focus to exchange value at a single moment in time. Left aside, or simply assumed, were the social, psychological, and institutional factors that conditioned that value. These included the ways that preferences were formed, the influence of ownership and property on the economy, and all phenomena relating to growth and change. Instead, marginalism leaves us with the dubious equation of an unregulated market with the greatest aggregate happiness and the related claim that happiness is best defined in terms of individual utility. These claims are, of course, philosophically controversial and would also have been rejected – at least as sweeping generalizations – by all of the classical political economists. They were attacked by economists writing at the same time, or soon after, the first marginalists: Thorstein Veblen, Leonard Hobhouse, and John Commons, among others. Later marginalists and later economic theory would respond to these concerns by simply banishing utility from the theory: henceforth choice would simply be equated with (revealed) maximal preference satisfaction, and the theory reduced to a bare tautology.

## CONCLUSION

There is one major striking theme in the story of nineteenth-century political economy. The fundamental divide that tears through the nineteenth century is not a divide so much of technical knowledge or rigor or even political orientation. It is fundamentally a question of vision. The classical political economists viewed the economy not so much as a series of homogeneous relations among individuals, but as a system of heterogeneous relationships among social classes. For Adam Smith, Ricardo, and Marx, the central question to be addressed was the distribution of the social product among the three great social classes. As Ricardo put it: “To determine the laws which regulate this distribution is the principle problem in political economy.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, this was a question that raised both explanatory (positive) and normative issues. The condition of the working poor had been a central focus of concern for the political economists. Mill, the Ricardian socialists, and Marx bequeathed a rich tradition of critical social thought, including arguments about the coerciveness of labor contracts as well as awareness about the asymmetric power of agents bargaining over the distribution of the social surplus. Moreover, for the classical political economists, these issues

<sup>30</sup> Ricardo, Preface to *Principles of Political Economy*, 5.

were tied to their respective visions of a good society. How to achieve that good society, and whether or not it could be maintained once achieved, or whether it would fall into a stationary state and decline were principal questions that preoccupied the political economists.

By the end of the nineteenth century, how to optimize consumer preferences had become the central question for economics. The neoclassical paradigm ushered in by the marginalist revolution takes the preferences of households, factor endowments, and forms of property as givens and on that basis generates a theory of prices. Moreover, the economy is viewed as an autonomous sphere of activity, independent of law, convention, or power. The marginalists' celebration of the market must assume away the presence of massive political power that would undermine the market's optimizing effects. Furthermore, human wants and resources are taken as given – people are simply assumed to have certain “endowments,” whose justice is not relevant; almost everything that the classical economists considered of interest in economic life has been omitted. It would take two world wars and a depression to crack the image of a consumer paradise wrought by the marginalists.

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## THE NATION-STATE

ERICA BENNER

The concept of the nation entered the political arena in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was used to express a new doctrine of political legitimacy based on a corporate metaphor: that there is, or should be, a body of subjects enduring over generations and changes of government, and that this body is authorized to confirm or reject the basic laws of the land. Since its first appearances in English republican rhetoric, the word 'nation' was used to mean a body of people who had ultimate authority or sovereignty over rulers and laws and who possessed in this capacity a moral identity distinct from the state. This distinctness made it possible to think of nations as the source of legitimacy in states. Although some later authors argued that national bodies must be defined by cultural features such as language or religion, the earliest political uses of the term 'nation' were open-ended about the characteristics that should distinguish one sovereign entity from another. If the early modern language of nationhood expressed any core idea, it was that polities should ideally be grounded in the authority conferred by a sovereign people who share both a sense of corporate *identity* with each other and a sense of being *distinct* from other peoples. The 'nation' in nation-state came to imply that states should have a special kind of legitimacy based on an identity among an entire population of a territory, cutting across diverse regions and social groups. A corollary of this idea was that legitimacy should originate in the people or polity, not be imposed from without.

The first philosopher to use the terms 'nation' and its cognates as part of a general theory of legitimacy was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78). Two earlier arguments influenced Rousseau's conception of national legitimacy. One was John Locke's argument that older doctrines of divine right and patriarchal government should be replaced by a theory of legitimacy based on a social contract among individuals. The other was Niccolò Machiavelli's argument that small city-states would be less vulnerable to foreign invasion if they reconstituted themselves

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as territorially unified, self-reliant republics, relying on their own armed and politically active citizens for military defense. In different ways, both Locke and Machiavelli connected the geopolitical and cultural ideals of territorial integrity and citizen identity to a new moral and political ideal, which, in Rousseau's writings, emerges as a doctrine of national self-constitution and self-determination. This idea challenged traditional doctrines that held that political constitutions could not be changed at will, particularly by a will grounded in popular authority. Rousseau's *Contrat Social* (1762) started by agreeing with his predecessors that neither tradition, heredity, the universal church, nor divine intervention had ultimate authority in determining a polity's boundaries or laws. It concluded that only the whole population of a territory – considered without distinctions of birth or wealth – may determine whether and how to constitute itself as a people or nation. Here and in his nation-building proposals for Corsica and Poland, Rousseau offered some of the most powerful general arguments ever made for preferring a national principle of legitimacy over competing doctrines.<sup>1</sup>

But while he argued that some crises of legitimacy and security could be solved by reconstituting older polities and peoples as nations, Rousseau's views on the nation-state were not naïvely idealistic. He recognized that attempts to recast politics according to national principles would involve new civil and international conflicts and that these could create new ethical dilemmas that were no easier to resolve than those generated by older legitimating principles. Rousseau's writings touched on three problems associated with the doctrine that polities should be bounded territorial states and that states should be based on or seek to produce a sense of national identity among all sections of their populations. The first problem arose from the ideal of a cohesive, ecumenical, and bounded national identity. This ideal raised a host of difficult questions about the rights of regions, minority groups, and individuals affected by nation-building policies. The second stemmed from the idea that national states should enjoy strong rights of sovereignty in international affairs, including the right to judge whether and when considerations of national interest might justify violations of international law. This international aspect of the national principle could help weak or threatened peoples. But the implication that sovereign national states alone could decide whether to respect or override legal and ethical restraints tended to exacerbate international insecurities, not relieve them. The third problem resulted from the norm of territorial boundedness implied by the nation-state ideal. In Europe and elsewhere, prenatal political arrangements had not required exclusive territorial sovereignty. Nonterritorial powers such as the Roman Catholic Church

<sup>1</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social* (21–165), *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne* (169–388), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 5 (Paris: Armand-Aubrée, 1829).

exerted authority alongside, and often in competition with, temporal territorial rulers, who in turn typically shared or divided jurisdiction in parts of their realm with other temporal authorities. By maintaining that national states required bounded territories controlled by a single authority, the nation-state principle provoked struggles among older regional authorities, which now sought to establish exclusive claims over lands and populations that had previously been administered as mixed jurisdictions. These struggles generated heated disputes – and ingeniously self-serving arguments – about the criteria for deciding which peoples were entitled to form their own national states and which were not.

The most reflective discussions of nationality from 1790 to 1870 weighed these problematic implications of the national principle alongside its defensive and liberating aims. All of the philosophers discussed in this chapter saw the nation-state as a valuable means of protecting local or historical liberties, at least in the context of their times. Yet they realized that the pursuit of national identity, international sovereignty, and territorial integrity involved moral and political costs. Some argued that the costs to local and personal freedom, peace, and international justice were prohibitive. They defended the formation of nation-states in strictly instrumental terms, as stepping-stones toward an international order in which member states voluntarily placed themselves under legal restraints. Other philosophers thought that in the long term, the advantages of reconfiguring the world in a national mold would outweigh what they expected to be the short-term costs of intensified conflicts over territory, political power, and cultural identity.

#### HERDER

During the last decades of the eighteenth century two German philosophers, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), offered very different assessments of the relative costs and merits of the national principle. Both were strongly influenced by their readings of Rousseau. Herder's philosophy of history challenged a tendency among his contemporaries to embrace a narrow set of standards for judging other historical periods, cultural artifacts, and political systems. His early writings criticize the unhistorical character of new works of political science inspired by Montesquieu, which identified static and universal criteria for evaluating laws and constitutions. Having spent his early adulthood in the culturally diverse environment of Riga, Herder disputed the conventional wisdom that countries such as France and Britain constituted models of good order for others to emulate, while Russia and non-European countries such as China were held up as countermodels of backwardness. Such judgments, he argued, reflected a failure to understand political and cultural differences as imaginative responses to particular physical, geographical, and temporal conditions.

A more adequate study of human affairs should explain these differences sympathetically, describing the specific circumstances that spawned diverse systems of laws and forms of government.<sup>2</sup>

These arguments carried important methodological implications. In general terms, they implied the priority of history over political science: judgments about the value of a political order were questionable unless they were grounded in a contextual account of a polity's particular history. More specifically, Herder proposed a shift in the main focus of historical studies from formal political institutions to informal relationships and characteristics of entire peoples, or *Völker*. Whereas contemporaries judged different societies by examining their political constitutions and asking how far they conformed to a universal 'spirit of the laws', Herder argued that these formal laws and constitutions were mere epiphenomena. The 'true culture' (*die wahre Kultur*) of a constitution, he insisted, lies not in how far it embodies universal norms but in the particular ethical practices (*Sitten*) of each people.<sup>3</sup> By distinguishing the outer appearance of social entities from their inner essence, Herder laid the basis for a novel conception of political legitimacy. His first move was to distinguish the formal constitutions from the informal cultural attributes of peoples and to give the latter priority as a subject of both historical analysis and ethical judgment. His second was to designate language as the chief repository of particular *Sitten* and the formation of diverse language-based communities as the most important expression of human dignity, setting mankind apart from other animals. The primary human groups, Herder suggested, are constituted by shared language and its products: songs, oral narratives embodying the group's distinctive traditions, sacred and mythical texts. *Völker* so constituted have an emotional and ethical importance for their members that cannot be matched by more artificial communities, including modern states. Language is the most important constitutive feature of humanity as a species and the main vehicle of human development: it is, Herder declared, "the organ of our reason and social activity, as the instrument of our culture and instruction, as the bond of sociability and good morals, as the true vehicle for the advancement of humanity in every class of men."<sup>4</sup>

Herder further argued that the diversity of language communities was an essential part of a providential plan for the moral advancement of humanity. Since different languages embody the particular interpretations of the experiences of diverse peoples, none may be ranked as inherently superior to others or

<sup>2</sup> "Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769," in J. G. Herder, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, eds. Martin Bollacher et al. (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker, 1985) [henceforth Herder, *Werke*], 9/2:11–126; *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*, Herder, *Werke* 4:11–107.

<sup>3</sup> "Journal," Herder, *Werke* 9/2:69.

<sup>4</sup> *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität*, Herder, *Werke* 7:65–8.

held up as a model for others to emulate.<sup>5</sup> These positions challenged a variety of scientific, utilitarian, and natural law arguments that were invoked by other philosophers to justify systems of national ranking. On Herder's account, such arguments rested on arbitrary and self-serving standards of rational administration, government, and property. Moreover, they were based on an impoverished conception of what reason required. Herder denied that the cognitive faculties of reason were separate from and superior to faculties of perception and feeling. All human languages were produced by the interplay of cognitive and noncognitive faculties, so that none could be deemed to contain a higher quantity of reason than any other. With this nonhierarchical picture of how the human mind creates language, Herder questioned the notion that the various products of language, as well as languages themselves, could be ranked on any one scale of progress or rationality.<sup>6</sup> His account of the most valuable products of language was inclusive, embracing all forms of verbal communicative expression: poetry and songs as well as science, myths and legends as well as factual histories, sacred lore and religious rituals. According to Herder, none of these products of language was intrinsically superior to others. Insofar as he made judgments about their comparative value, these provocatively inverted the intellectualist standards of his era. Echoing Martin Luther as well as Rousseau, Herder suggested that vernacular languages were closer to God's truth and to nature than the "dead" language of Catholic priests, the stilted French favored in many German courts, or the formalized languages of modern science. The lower social orders were best qualified to preserve distinct languages in their unadulterated purity, since they were least corrupted by elite culture with its penchant for foreign borrowings.<sup>7</sup>

By treating communities based on language as the main subjects of human history and history as the gradual unfolding of purposes implanted in the species by its Creator, Herder assigned a formidable moral and political power to language-based identities. Earlier authors such as Machiavelli and Rousseau had recognized that affinities of language could have an instrumental value as one of many possible bases of political unity. But no philosopher before Herder had suggested that identities based on language were the primary source of legitimate political authority. His conception of the ideal relationship between communities of language and political units is ambiguous. His mature writings seem to deny that separate, monoglot states should be the terminus of historical development. In the long run he called for the toleration of cultural differences, not the

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder, Werke 4:65: "Bildung und Fortbildung einer Nation ist nie anders als ein Werk des Schicksals: Resultat tausend mitwirkender Ursachen."

<sup>6</sup> "Vom Erkennen und Empfinden in ihren Menschlichen Ursprunge," Herder, Werke 4:329–93; *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, Herder, Werke 1:696–767.

<sup>7</sup> *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Herder, Werke 6:345–55.



formation of ethnocentric nation-states. In the shorter term, however, language-based identities were seen as a valuable rallying point of resistance to imperial conquests and coercive policies of cultural assimilation. Herder reproached self-styled “Enlightened” rulers such as the Habsburg emperor Joseph II for trying to “weld together” diverse provinces and peoples “under one legal code, one system of education, and one monarchy.” Such efforts were bound to provoke healthy impulses to resist subjection. For what is dearer to a people, Herder asked, than the language of their fathers? In it “resides all the riches of its thought, tradition, history, religion and the basic principles of life, all its heart and soul.” To denigrate a person’s native language is to attack what makes that person human. “He who would suppress my language,” Herder wrote, “would also rob me of my reason and my way of life, and my people of honour and rights.”<sup>8</sup> Herder further implied that in the context of struggles to preserve distinctive languages and cultures against centralizing states and imperial expansion, it was reasonable to see national egoism, even national or ethnic “hatred,” as playing a constructive role in the history of human development. Since attempts to impose alien cultural or political patterns went against the larger providential plan to preserve diversity in the human species, national egoism – however deplorable when judged by the ultimate goals of humanity – should be judged in some contexts as a “noble human weakness” (*edle menschliche Schwachheit*) rather than piously denounced as “narrow nationalism” (*eingeschränkten Nationalismus*).<sup>9</sup>

This perspective suggests that judgments about the means and ends of nation building must be made from two standpoints: an ideal standpoint, which sees cultural pluralism as the eventual goal of historical development, but also a non-ideal standpoint of contemporary power politics, which forces politically less organized peoples to take defensive action. This dual frame of judgment makes it difficult to answer an important question about Herder’s legacy: did he think that in nonideal conditions vulnerable peoples and polities should form new nation-states of their own, based on the same military capacities and norms of territorial integrity as the larger powers that threatened them? On the one hand, he studiously avoided explicit endorsements of military action in defense of nationality and never directly enjoined weaker peoples to build up armies or state power.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, his lyrical descriptions of various *Völker* often carried provocative political undertones. In an idealized description of the Slavic peoples, for example, Herder wrote that in contrast to their Germanic and Latin neighbors,

<sup>8</sup> *Briefe*, Herder, Werke 7:65–8.

<sup>9</sup> *Abhandlung*, Herder, Werke 1:796; *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder, Werke 4:39, 61–77.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see his proposals for strengthening a sense of pan-German nationality through cultural measures in “Idee zum Ersten Patriotischen Institut für den Allgemeingeist Deutschlands” (1787), Herder, Werke 9/2:565–80.

the (non-Russian) Slavs were historically “submissive and obedient, foes to plunder and rapine.” But these qualities “contributed to their being oppressed,” for “it was the misfortune of these people that their love of quiet and domestic industry was incompatible with any permanent military establishment, although they were valiant in the passionate defence of their lands.” Herder implied that the Slavs’ current plight was due not to geographical or political misfortune alone, but to their own attitudes: they were oppressed *because* they loved peace and quiet. He made no concrete suggestions for improving Slav fortunes. But it is unsurprising that in the nineteenth century and after, many a red-blooded Slav read his comments as a muffled call to arms. If there were any chance of reversing the Slavs’ bad fortunes, their pacific disposition would have to be supplanted by a spirit of resistance, and – however regrettably – by the formation of permanent military establishments.<sup>11</sup>

How then might nation building be regulated so that measures taken to strengthen national bodies would not fatally undermine long-range goals of coexistence? While Herder’s arguments gave a strong hand to weaker peoples seeking to resist subjection, he said very little about the restraints they should observe when forging new nation-states or waging national wars. He was silent as to whether political claims based on language-group identities should be assessed in terms of conditions such as individual rights, political pluralism, collective property rights, or geopolitical viability. Without such restraints, however, it remained unclear why a principle of legitimacy based on language-based identities should be expected to resolve conflicts over identity, external sovereignty, and territorial control. Indeed, such a principle could exacerbate these problems by imposing a criterion for political unity – common language – that is notoriously hard to define or apply. Herder did not specify, for example, which peoples should be involved in German nation-building efforts: neither he nor his early followers distinguished clearly among German-speaking, Germanic, and Teutonic *Völker*. This vagueness left room for self-serving interpretations, proving convenient for nationalists who realized that an expansive definition of the German language could help to improve the geopolitical standing of any future German state.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This interpretation was encouraged by Herder’s prophecy that “you once diligent and happy peoples who have sunk so low, will at last awaken from your long and heavy slumber, will be freed from your enslaving chains.” The Slavic peoples would then at last “use as your own” the vast territories now dominated by Habsburg Germans and Ottoman Turks. *Ideen*, Herder, *Werke* 6:696–9; *On World History: Johann Gottfried Herder, An Anthology*, eds. H. Adler and E. A. Menze (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 300–1.

<sup>12</sup> Starting from Herderian premises about the need to develop national culture as a means of self-preservation, Johann Gottlieb Fichte suggested that German national identity could be understood to encompass a broad language family including speakers of Dutch as well as the (Germanic) Scandinavian languages. *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, in J. G. Fichte, *Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970) [henceforth Fichte, SW], 7:311–12.

The underlying problem here is not empirical, that is, that Herder was insufficiently specific about the boundaries and content of German nationhood. It is a more basic problem with any theory of legitimacy grounded in group identities rather than in the wishes of its members: someone has to decide what the morally decisive forms of identity are and then to identify particular instances in order to apply the theory. Instead of providing a criterion for legitimacy that does not depend on highly disputed facts, emotions, or religious convictions, language-based national identity opens up a Pandora's box of potential disputes over boundaries and criteria for national membership.

Despite his commitment to ideal goals of peaceful toleration, then, Herder's failure to suggest clear restraints on nation building in nonideal conditions left an ambivalent legacy for national movements inspired by his ideas. He showed weak peoples new ways to resist subjection by asserting the moral and emotional power of cultural identities against brute power politics. But his methods generated new problems for both individual and minority rights within new nation-states and failed to address deeper causes of international conflict. Herder's lack of interest in ethical restraints was not just a matter of omission: it was underwritten by the strongly teleological structure of his ethical doctrines. These focused on the proper ends of humanity but said little about principles that should restrain the choice of means used to pursue those ends. Perhaps more importantly, Herder seldom discussed ethical issues in terms of individual or collective *human* agency, choices, and actions. The agencies that posit and pursue the ends of history appear in Herder's writings as suprahuman forces: Nature, Providence, or God. These are ascribed intentions, desires, and vocations that are held to explain a variety of natural and social phenomena. Thus Herder claimed that divisions of geography, language, and customs serve the aims of a purposive Nature, blocking "the presumptuous linking together of the peoples" and forming "a dam against foreign inundations," for "the steward of the world," he wrote, "was concerned that for the security of the whole [human species] each people and race preserved its impress, its character; peoples should live beside each other, not mixed up with and on top of each other."<sup>13</sup> Clearly, the purposes of such suprahuman agencies cannot be second-guessed or restrained as can the choices and actions of human beings. But if human actions are ultimately judged in relation to suprahuman purposes, then it is hard to see how actions in the here and now can be judged as right or wrong, except in a very long-range historical perspective. Herder claimed to have gained the requisite perspective through the study of universal history and argued that history is directed by a wise, purposive nature that will

<sup>13</sup> *Briefe*, Herder, Werke 7:687; *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. M. N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 385.

ultimately “heal itself” and “compensate” for selfish or reckless actions in the present.<sup>14</sup> Viewed from the standpoint of the subsequent history of nation building and national self-assertion, this optimistic determinism seems misplaced.

## KANT

In 1785–6, Herder’s onetime mentor Immanuel Kant published two critical reviews of Herder’s wide-ranging *Idea for a Universal History*. The relationship between the two men soured after this. Yet the confrontation may have provoked both to write more prolifically than ever on questions of national legitimacy and international coexistence for the rest of their careers. Their arguments appear to constitute an unacknowledged debate between two contrasting approaches to the ethics of nation building and national self-determination. Kant’s approach contains several elements: (1) a theory of history and philosophical anthropology, (2) a general doctrine of rights and duties, (3) a specific account of national rights according to this doctrine, and (4) a doctrine of international right.

### *Theory of History and Philosophical Anthropology*

Herder argued that the study of universal history can yield knowledge of Providence’s plans for humanity. It, therefore, constitutes the main source of moral knowledge. Kant agreed that the notion of a providential plan of nature was a helpful ‘idea of reason’, capable of inspiring efforts to human self-improvement. He also acknowledged that it may be reasonable to represent religious or cultural differences as barriers erected by a purposive nature to thwart the evils of universal despotism.<sup>15</sup> But Herder was wrong, Kant argued, to treat such representations as articles of theoretical knowledge, capable of supporting ‘absolute’ teleological judgments. At most, they were ‘hypothetical’ speculations that could supplement but not ground moral reasonings.<sup>16</sup> In failing to distinguish absolute judgments

<sup>14</sup> *Briefe*, Herder, Werke 7:726–7, 740–1; trans. in *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, 410, 418.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see *Zum Ewigen Frieden*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [henceforth Kant, Ak], 8:361–8; “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht,” Kant, Ak 8:17–30.

<sup>16</sup> Kant’s distinction between absolute and hypothetical teleological judgments is closely related to a further distinction between “constitutive” and “regulative” judgments about the ends of nature. Regulative judgments merely “ascribe causality in regard to an object to a concept of the object as if it were to be found in nature (not in us), or rather we represent the possibility of the object in accordance with the analogy of such a causality (like the one we encounter in ourselves).” Such judgments are acceptable since unless we ascribe this kind of agency to nature, “we would have to represent its causality as a blind mechanism.” Constitutive judgments, however, overstep the bounds of theoretical reason: for they “base nature on intentionally acting causes” and thus “ground teleology not merely on a regulative principle for the mere judging of

about the ends of history from hypothetical speculations, Herder placed unwarranted faith in suprapolitical agencies that he supposed would resolve human conflicts in the long run.<sup>17</sup> This deterministic teleology had damaging ethical implications. The idea that an inexorable, Providence-driven Nature directs human actions toward peaceful coexistence may discourage people from taking moral responsibility for their own actions. Instead of seeking to establish peace through their own acts of self-legislation, they may be tempted to justify even their most selfish or unjust actions with reference to a higher destiny. Against this, Kant insisted that only one hypothesis about the intentions of nature could be inferred from experience: namely, that man “should work his way onwards to *make himself* by his own conduct worthy of life and well-being” unaided by suprahuman guidance of any kind.<sup>18</sup>

This rigorously anthropocentric view of moral responsibility lay at the core of Kant’s disagreement with Herder’s ethics of self-determination. Kant’s philosophical anthropology addressed a more specific issue: insofar as Nature’s purposes can be the subject of hypothetical judgments, how likely is it that those purposes include the progressive moral improvement of the human species? Herder argued that the human species must gradually shed its corrupt character. Human beings had, he insisted, incipient moral capacities that would enable them to overcome their egoism and attend to others’ needs without the external constraints imposed by laws. Since conflictual dispositions (*Gesinnungen*) could be permanently changed through moral teaching and experience, there was no need to hold them in check through coercive laws and institutions.<sup>19</sup> Kant agreed that education is a valuable means of reducing egoism and warlike dispositions in each generation. He doubted, however, that it could effect a permanent or trans-generational change in the human character. The only reliable way to improve chances of peaceful coexistence was to change external actions, not inner dispositions. Neither experience nor reason supported Herder’s faith in man’s capacity to develop dispositions that will make coercive laws redundant.<sup>20</sup> Laws that

appearances, to which nature in its particular laws could be thought of as subjected, but rather on a constitutive principle for the derivation of its products from their causes.” *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant, Ak 5:361, 410–15. Also see “Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis,” Kant, Ak 8:275.

<sup>17</sup> “Rezension zu Johann Gottfried Herders Ideen,” Kant, Ak 8:45–66.

<sup>18</sup> “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte,” Kant, Ak 8:17–30; in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 44–5.

<sup>19</sup> *Briefe*, Herder, Werke 7:726–7.

<sup>20</sup> In Kant’s view, a more reasonable hypothesis would be that the human being’s unchanging and “proper moral condition ... is virtue, that is, moral disposition *in conflict*, and not holiness ... the supposed possession of a complete purity of dispositions of the will.” People who adopt Herder’s outlook tend to have a “high-flown, fantastic cast of mind, flattering themselves with a spontaneous goodness of heart that needs neither spur nor bridle.” *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Kant, Ak 5:85; in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 208.

people agree to impose on themselves must establish restraints on actions; formal institutional frameworks are the necessary foundation of lasting peace.

### *Rights and Duties*

In contrast to Herder's, formal principles of right are the cornerstone of Kant's approach to the territorial, political, and cultural problems that arose from demands to make states more national. Kant defines the concept of right (*Recht*) as "the sum of the conditions under which the choice of one can be united with the choice of another in accordance with a universal law of freedom."<sup>21</sup> He drew a distinction between innate [*angeborene*] rights and external [*äußerlich*] rights. An innate right belongs to everyone by nature, independently of any act that would establish a right. External rights are acquired by acts. According to Kant, there is only one innate right: "Freedom (independence from being constrained by another's choice), insofar as it can coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal law, is the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity." This right is inherently egalitarian in the specific sense that it recognizes each person's "independence from being bound by others to more than one can in turn bind them" and hence each "human being's quality of being his own master."<sup>22</sup> Innate rights can only be rights of individual persons. External rights may be enacted between individuals or corporations such as provinces, colonies, cities, or religious groups. These may then be represented for juridical purposes as 'moral persons'.<sup>23</sup>

Whereas Herder focused one-sidedly on claims of the weaker parties to national conflicts, Kant's doctrine of right sets out principles that can assess claims from different sides, abstracting from considerations of relative power or the emotional significance of group identities. Under Kant's definition of right, the rights of particular persons or corporations must be placed under a general (*allgemein*) 'law' coercing each to respect the equal freedom of the others. This concept stresses not only what a right holder can claim from others, but simultaneously what he owes to them as possessors of equal rights to freedom. It involves two correlative duties for right-holders: a duty not to invade any other (individual or corporate) person's freedom and a more general duty to place oneself under a law of freedom that coerces everyone to refrain from such invasions. The first duty of 'respect' [*Achtung*] "is, strictly speaking, only a negative one (of not exalting oneself over others) and is thus analogous to the duty of right not to encroach upon

<sup>21</sup> *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:230; in *Practical Philosophy*, 387.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, Ak 6:237–8.

<sup>23</sup> Kant defines a moral/juridical "person" as "a subject whose actions can be imputed to him": Kant, Ak 6:223.

what belongs to anyone.” It requires all individuals or corporations to restrain their natural tendencies to place their own freedom and interests above others’ equal rights, or “the maxim of limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person.” A moral doctrine based on self-legislated right stresses the need for external self-restraint through the creation of rational, man-made laws; it should not encourage self-assertion in the name of natural or God-given laws.<sup>24</sup> In “observing a duty of respect,” Kant writes, “I keep myself within my own bounds so as not to detract anything from the worth that the other, as a human being, is authorized to put upon himself.”<sup>25</sup> The second duty suggests positive moral and political prescriptions beyond self-restraint, namely, a duty to seek to establish “a public lawful condition” wherein “individual human beings, peoples and states [*vereinzelte Menschen, Völker und Staaten*]” can be secure against violence from one another.<sup>26</sup>

### *National Rights*

This general doctrine of right implies a distinctive ethics of national self-determination. It has three main elements:

1. First, it is rigorously *nonteleological*. Freedom under law is “an idea which can be fulfilled only on condition that the *means* employed to do so are compatible with morality. This limiting condition must not be overstepped” or aim of promoting justice will be undermined.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, he insists that particular rights derived from the basic right to freedom may not be specified in terms of particular ends, happiness, welfare.<sup>28</sup> Rights are concerned with regulating only “the external and indeed practical relation of one person to another, insofar as their actions, as deeds [*als Facta*], can have (direct or indirect) influence on each other,” not to affect their ends or dispositions.<sup>29</sup> National rights to self-constitution and self-legislation cannot be made conditional on adopting specific forms of government, types of identity, or forms of property. The only valid criterion is whether or not actions taken in pursuit of these rights infringe on the equal freedom of other peoples.
2. Second, Kant’s approach is strongly *antipaternalist*. It holds that laws – even laws that are meant to increase freedom – will lack legitimacy if they are authored or imposed through methods that violate the principle of equal respect for the freedom of all. “For a unilateral will (and a bilateral but still particular will is also unilateral) cannot put everyone under an obligation”; this requires “a will that is

<sup>24</sup> It “excludes altogether the influence of self-love” or self-conceit on any discussion of basic rights. *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Kant, Ak 5:74.

<sup>25</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:449–50/*Practical Philosophy*, 569.

<sup>26</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:311–12.

<sup>27</sup> “Der Streit der Fakultäten,” Kant, Ak 7:87n.

<sup>28</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:220–30/*Practical Philosophy*, 386–7.

<sup>29</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:229–30.

omnilateral.... For only in accordance with this principle ... is it possible for the free choice of each to accord with the freedom of all, and therefore possible for there to be any right."<sup>30</sup> The basic principle of equal freedom is violated from the outset when people are treated "like immature children who cannot distinguish what is truly useful or harmful to themselves" or are "obliged to behave purely passively and to rely on the judgement" of another "as to how they ought to be happy, and upon his kindness in willing their happiness at all."<sup>31</sup>

3. Third, Kant denies that the *rights of corporate persons* can be reduced either to historical rights or to the rights of individual members. For Kant corporate identities – whether cultural or political, historical or voluntary – have no intrinsic or fundamental moral value. Nonetheless, corporate entities can acquire strong external rights to be considered as moral persons through various acts of their members, particularly rights against conquest or legislation imposed from outside. Kant distinguishes two kinds of constitutive action that confer a measure of legitimacy. First, successive actions in the *history* of each "society of men (*Gesellschaft von Menschen*)" make it reasonable to represent it as an organic body when discussing rights. Noting that historical societies are often represented metaphorically as trees with "roots" of their own, Kant argues that to incorporate such an organic entity "as a graft into another state is to take away its existence as a moral person and to make of it a thing." But the legitimacy conferred by history is merely provisional (*provisorisch*) until the polity's constitution has been affirmed by its members' reflective *consent*, on the model of a social contract. This is the second, rational act of constitutive legitimation, deriving from the idea of just constitution rather than from history alone. Kant sees the rational authorization as a condition for full legitimacy. At the same time, he strictly forbids attempts to justify foreign occupation or imposition on grounds that the current constitution of a people falls short of the ideal of full (consensual or rational) legitimacy. However deficient their current political order, a society's members still have a sense of transgenerational ownership and responsibility derived from history, which generates strong presumptions against intervention or conquest. As Kant put it, the land on which such societies have grown is a "patrimonium" and the state itself "a society of men" that "no one other than itself can command or to dispose of."<sup>32</sup>

It is true that Kant said almost nothing about a problem that would soon threaten established empires and dynasties in Europe: the demands of 'peoples' to form new states through unification or secession. The conclusion that he gave short shrift to the claims of stateless peoples is unwarranted, however. Although Kant's ethics of nationhood is grounded in individual rather than group rights and gives consent primacy over history as a moral ground of legitimacy, it nonetheless takes group-based and historical rights very seriously at a secondary level

<sup>30</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:262–65/*Practical Philosophy*, 415–16.

<sup>31</sup> "Über den Gemeinspruch," Kant, Ak 8:291/*Political Writings*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> *Zum Ewigen Frieden*, Kant, Ak 8:344/*Political Writings*, 94. Indeed, unauthorized occupation "contradicts the idea of the original contract, without which the rights of a people are unthinkable."



of justification. Distinctions between stateless peoples and national states were not drawn clearly in Kant's time: both the meaning of these concepts and the entities they later referred to were weakly articulated until the late nineteenth century, and Kant's usage reflects this fluidity.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, he was open to recognizing provinces, cities, religious bodies, and other political or administrative entities as juridical persons with rights against more powerful states and empires. Indeed, he acknowledged that some such entities and peoples might have good reasons to constitute new states under international pressure.<sup>34</sup>

In his discussions of property rights, moreover, Kant directly addressed problems faced by peoples who lacked a strong political or military organization. The main arguments cited to justify conquest and colonialism in and outside Europe involved not just claims of cultural or technological superiority, but also Lockean claims about the rational use of land and natural resources. Kant confronted such claims not by denying the superiority of Western technology or culture, which he saw as irrelevant, but by insisting that the claims should be considered strictly in terms of the restraints on external actions laid down by the doctrine of right. Viewed in this light, it was clear that claims about higher and lower civilizations or best use of land had no bearing whatsoever on external (enacted, nonnatural) rights of territorial jurisdiction, whether these were established through history or contract. "When," Kant asked rhetorically, "neither nature nor chance but just our own will brings us into the neighbourhood of a people that holds out no prospect of civil union with it" are we then "authorised to found colonies, by force if need be, in order to establish a civil union with them and bring these human beings (savages) into a rightful condition (as with the American Indians, the Hottentots and the inhabitants of New Holland)"? Or indeed, did the doctrine of right permit the founding of colonies through the "fraudulent purchase" of others' land, "without regard for their first possession," especially since "great expanses of land in other parts of the world, which are now splendidly populated, would have otherwise remained uninhabited by civilised people ... so that the end of creation would have been frustrated?" His succinct answer: "it is easy to see through this veil of injustice, which would sanction any means to good ends. Such a way of acquiring land is therefore to be repudiated."<sup>35</sup> He praised countries like China and Japan for restricting European incursions and condemned

<sup>33</sup> In discussing international ethics Kant deliberately chose to speak of "the right of states" (*Staatenrecht*) rather than "the right of peoples" (*Völkerrecht*), although the latter was the usual German translation of *ius gentium*.

<sup>34</sup> For example, he remarks that a people (*ein Volk*) often finds itself "confronted by another neighbouring people pushing in upon it, thus forcing it to form itself internally into a state (*Staat*) in order to encounter the other as an armed power (*als Macht*)."  
*Zum Ewigen Frieden*, Kant, Ak 8:366/*Political Writings*, 112.

<sup>35</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:266–7/*Practical Philosophy*.

the “evil and violence” that attended the commercial expansion of Europeans into other lands.<sup>36</sup>

### *International Rights and Duties*

How could Kant reconcile these strong national rights with duties to establish international restraints on national building and movements of national resistance? He addressed this question in 1797. The French Revolution, he wrote, had popularized two equally valid political principles but not shown how they might be combined. One was “the *right* of every people to give itself a civil constitution of the kind that it sees fit, without interference from other powers.” The other was “the aim, which is also a duty, of submitting to those conditions by which war, the source of all evils and moral corruption, can be prevented.”<sup>37</sup> The revolution and ensuing wars brought the question of justifiable intervention to the forefront of political debates. Both defenders and opponents of the early revolution showed a marked inclination toward crusading interventionism, arguing that their vision of European order depended on establishing friendly governments and constitutions everywhere, if necessary, by force. Kant saw this as a recipe for anarchy bound to fuel future national wars. He sought to address the conflict between particular national rights and the need for a general system of international *Recht* by proposing a two-track account of national legitimacy, based on a distinction between ‘provisional’ and ‘peremptory’ rights. Provisional rights were established through unilateral or bilateral action. In their present form, the rights of state sovereignty could be considered as provisional rights. They served to protect already constituted polities from foreign meddling, conquest, or absorption. As such they took sovereign states out of a pure, lawless international state of nature but did not put them into a fully lawful civil order. Peremptory rights were established ‘omnilaterally’ by civil law and involved a commitment to abandon the state of nature in favor of a fully civil condition among contracting parties.<sup>38</sup>

This distinction allowed Kant to insist on the formal priority of the right of noninterference over the duty to establish free constitutions within or between nation-states. Rights of sovereignty, though only provisional, set constraints on action that cannot be made conditional on any person or polity’s interpretation of higher standards of justice. But in the international state of nature “all international rights,” including rights to external sovereignty, “are purely provisional.” Even if war made it necessary to strengthen barriers between states and

<sup>36</sup> *Zum Ewigen Frieden*, Kant, Ak 8:359/*Political Writings*, 106–7; *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:264–6.

<sup>37</sup> *Streit der Fakultäten*, Kant, Ak 7:86.

<sup>38</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:257–64/ *Practical Philosophy*, 410–16.

peoples in the short term, governments had a basic duty to their subjects and their neighbors to strive toward establishing “a federation of peoples [*Völkerbund*] in accordance with the idea of an original social contract”. This should initially be conceived as “only a partnership or confederation (*nur eine Genößenschaft [Föderalität]*)” and avoid striving to become a *Weltrepublik*. Yet the only way out of the state of war was for states to “renounce their savage and lawless freedom, adapt themselves to public coercive laws, and thus form an international state (*civitas gentium*) [*Völkerstaat*], which would necessarily continue to grow until it embraced all the peoples of the earth.” This end could only be realized through the will of the peoples concerned, who did not, Kant conceded, wish for it on “their present conception of international right.” For the time being, it may still find “a negative substitute in the shape of an enduring and gradually expanding federation (*Bund*) likely to prevent war,” based on the rational understanding of “the human race as a complete association of men.”<sup>39</sup>

While Kant defended strong provisional rights of national sovereignty in international relations, then, he insisted on the deeper principles that should restrain the abuse of sovereignty: the autonomy of individual subjects and the equal freedom of people beyond one’s own state. Moreover, his arguments implied that purely national solutions to the international state of war are too one-sided to satisfy his two-track criteria. Internal reforms to establish republican constitutions might help particular states to rein in warmongering kings and armies. But even where this was feasible, “unilateral” reforms left states in an unstable international state of nature, so that even peace-loving republics have “directed their internal arrangements” toward the waging of war.<sup>40</sup> For Kant “the problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution” is, therefore, “subordinate to the problem of a law-governed external relationship with other states, and cannot be solved unless the latter is also solved.”<sup>41</sup> Considered in the present historical context, national states were defensible as means of self-preservation and frames for promoting freedom among people in a given territory. But Kant agreed with Rousseau that the nation-state ideal could encourage “the abuse of reciprocally conflicting freedom” as well as solve problems of human coexistence. Witnessing the ever more ruthless organization of collective egoism in nation-states during the last years of his life, Kant concluded that national means of seeking freedom and security were self-defeating unless national bodies took the further step of voluntarily restraining themselves under “a state of international right, based upon enforceable public laws to which each state must submit.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Zum Ewigen Frieden*, Kant, Ak 8:356–7/*Political Writings*, 105.

<sup>40</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Kant, Ak 6:355/*Practical Philosophy*, 491.

<sup>41</sup> *Idee*, Kant, Ak 8:24–5/*Political Writings*, 47–8.

<sup>42</sup> “Über den Gemeinspruch,” Kant, Ak 8:310–12/*Political Writings*, 91–2.

Kant's ethics of self-legislation depended on the will of people in strong and weak states to restrain their own national ambitions and fears under coercive international law. That will was greatly weakened by the French Revolution and ensuing wars. Although there were numerous attempts to reconcile claims of national self-determination with some form of internationalism during the nineteenth century, the general tendency in European philosophy after 1800 was to defend national claims by appealing to the higher ethical meaning and vocation of historically evolved groups rather than the rights and duties of persons.

#### FICHTE

Kant died in 1804. By then the confederation of German states known as the Holy Roman Empire was in deep trouble, as members began openly to pursue separate alliances with other European powers. In 1806 Napoleon, the main catalyst of these changes, invaded Prussia. These events were witnessed by two young German philosophers, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Both men questioned the adequacy of Kant's right-based approach to problems of national self-determination and, in response to political and international pressures, came to judge national claims in relation to teleological conceptions of history.

Fichte's arguments present a paradox. On the one hand, both his early and late writings maintain strongly cosmopolitan positions.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808) contain some of the most stridently nationalistic passages penned by any philosopher in the nineteenth century. Fichte said nothing about the need for German unity before 1806 and until then gave scant attention to questions of political identity. In his youth he defended a radical version of French Revolutionary doctrines, including a unitary concept of the nation based on republican principles rather than cultural distinctions.<sup>44</sup> To see how nationalist arguments could spring up in this unlikely soil, it is helpful to compare Fichte's views on international right with Kant's. In a review of *Perpetual Peace* published in 1796, Fichte denied that there are rights in the unjust international state of nature. Kant wanted to treat the provisional legal rights of

<sup>43</sup> For example, in 1800 he declared characteristically that "our species (*Geschlecht*) is destined to unify itself into one single body, thoroughly acquainted with itself in all its parts and everywhere educated in the same way." *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, Fichte, SW 2 (271); Peter Preuss, ed. *The Vocation of Man* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 85.

<sup>44</sup> *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die französische Revolution*, Fichte, SW 6:39–286. The line between republican and cultural forms of identification becomes ominously thin when, in defending an extremely exclusionary version of French arguments for national unity, Fichte attacks various types of "state within the state" – including, in a long footnote, that allegedly formed by the Jews.

states as a bridge leading to pacific confederation. Fichte agreed with the end but questioned the means. He implicitly endorsed crusading republican interventionism as a necessary means to defend the revolutionary cause against the forces of international reaction. Enduring peace must be sought not by protecting the sovereign rights of peoples to choose whatever constitution they see fit, but, if needed, by coercing them into “unity with a common essence [*Wesen*] in which each is prevented by force [*Zwang*] from violating rights.” Rejecting Kant’s distinction between provisional and peremptory right, Fichte was able to accept a wider range of means in the struggle for a rational moral order, including the use of force to establish republican constitutions. But he also suggested that the emergence of two “new phenomena” might encourage the peaceful transformation of states into republics: the “North American free state, from which enlightenment and freedom must necessarily spread over the other ... subjugated parts of the world” and the “great European republic of states [*Staatenrepublik*],” which stood as “a dam against barbarian incursions on the development of human culture (*Cultur*)” and guaranteed the balance of power in the absence of effective international law.<sup>45</sup> Fichte did not name the *Staatenrepublik* here, but he used the term elsewhere for the German Reich. Here was one of the few early references to Germany’s special role in Europe, based on its geopolitical situation and role in wider human ‘culture’.

As war in Europe intensified, Fichte began to pay more attention to culture, geography, and economics as means of improving in practice on Kant’s merely “theoretical” solution to national conflicts. His *Closed Commercial State* (1800) defended economic autarky as a way to escape the “commercial anarchy” that fed European wars. By the time Napoleon invaded Prussia, Fichte had begun to reconsider his earlier defense of republican interventionism. In 1806 he returned with a jolt to the question whether states or peoples had rights against crusading foreign occupiers when the occupation aimed to establish a more rational republican constitution. With an ingenious mix of republican and dynastic arguments, he now argued that established states were justified in using force against foreign “usurpation,” even when their constitution was more backward than the one proposed by outsiders.<sup>46</sup> Then in 1807, only months before delivering the *Addresses*, Fichte published an essay on Machiavelli that foreshadowed other elements of his nationalist answer to French conquest. Praising the Florentine’s desire to confer unity on an embattled Italy, Fichte argued that the extreme corruption of the competitive European states system left little room for choice as to means of just resistance. This did not mean that rights of states and peoples should

<sup>45</sup> “Von Kant zum ewigen Frieden,” Fichte, SW 8:430, 435.

<sup>46</sup> “In Beziehung auf den Namenlosen,” Fichte, SW 7:512–16.

be thrown out the door. It did mean adopting a strongly consequentialist ethics aimed at realizing a “higher ethical order” as a precondition for peace.<sup>47</sup>

These elements all joined in the *Addresses*. Fichte called on Germans to mobilize around a common national identity, urging them to “throw away foreign artifices.” A Machiavelli-inspired doctrine of resistance to conquest was at the core of Fichte’s national values. He pointed out that like Italians, very few Germans had a sense of national identity transcending their separate states. “If it had already existed in the majority,” he observed, “we should not have got into the plight which we are now considering; therefore it ... must first of all be instilled in them.” The key was a truly national system of education that would forge a sense of shared identity across German states. Fichte argued that spiritual resources were a better means of resistance than arms. The Germans’ best weapons were their high principles, morals, and ‘earnest’ character. With frequent allusions to Martin Luther, whom he hoped to succeed as the leading German crusader against foreign corruption, Fichte insisted that self-liberation should be conjoined with a mission to seek the “salvation” of “the whole human race” under German guidance. This was to be done by spreading the true system of education outlined in the *Addresses*, not by military or political means.<sup>48</sup>

By focusing on educational nation building, Fichte equivocated on a crucial question: should the German nation aim to form a single unitary state, and, if so, what means of achieving it were acceptable? Fichte was reluctant to follow the French centralist pattern of nation-statehood in Germany. The *Addresses* contain heartfelt passages praising the separation of state and cultural nation in German-speaking lands and implying that political plurality was a more natural condition for Germans than unity. In the loose confederation of the old Reich, each individual could “seek out for himself in the whole length and breadth of this fatherland the culture most congenial to him ... and talent did not root itself like a tree in the place where it first grew up, but was allowed to seek out its own place.” Nevertheless, Fichte concluded that international pressures left Germans no choice but to work toward political unity. After a generation of upheavals, the idea that strong ‘unity’ was needed to constitute viable states was becoming a staple of political wisdom. Events during the revolutionary era aroused fears that “where a people has ceased to govern itself, it is equally bound to give up its language and to coalesce with its conquerors, in order that there may be unity and internal peace.” If sacrificing political pluralism and cultural variety was the price to be paid for national survival, then Germans should bite the bullet and spare

<sup>47</sup> “Über Machiavelli,” Fichte, SW 11:410, 427, 406–7.

<sup>48</sup> *Reden*, Fichte, SW 7:466, 397–9, 470–1, 499; *Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. George Armstrong Kelly (New York: Harper, 1968), 177, 132, 201, 228.

no more tears for the old order. Ideally, the German nation-state should protect republican liberties, giving “freedom as wide a field as possible, even at the risk of securing a smaller degree of uniform peace and quietness.” But in the face of an external threat, it may be necessary to suspend laws protecting freedom and the right of individuals to criticize their state. Then it was “not the spirit of the peaceful citizen’s love for the constitution and the laws, but the devouring flame of a higher patriotism” that must have “an undisputed right to summon and to order everyone concerned.”<sup>49</sup>

Most of these arguments were consistent with Fichte’s general philosophy. One element was entirely new and disappeared again after the *Addresses*: the emphasis on language as the defining element of nationhood. Before 1808, Fichte showed no Herder-like interest in identities based on language. Now, suddenly, language is given basic legitimating functions. Fichte was one of the first authors to argue that language communities have a right to self-government: “whenever a separate language is found, there a separate nation exists, which has the right to take independent charge of its affairs and to govern itself.”<sup>50</sup> If language now legitimated states, it also underwrote a moral hierarchy among nations, giving some the right to lead others. According to Fichte’s *Addresses*, some languages are pure, while others have been corrupted by foreign borrowings and the insincerity of their users. Fichte treated the supposed purity of the German language more as a sign of providential German election<sup>51</sup> – and a tribute to the down-to-earth sincerity of the Germans, as opposed to the superficial French – than as an empirical fact. It is likely that he borrowed these ideas from other more consistently nationalist contemporaries.<sup>52</sup> For Fichte the philosopher of reason, nonrational arguments were apparently admissible as necessary means of resisting conquest while seeking, in the longer term, to advance the good of the species. He left later generations to ponder whether such a strongly consequentialist approach might jeopardize its own rational and humanitarian goals.

## HEGEL

Eight years younger than Fichte, Hegel was a reluctant theology student when the ancien régime crumbled in France. Like many young German intellectuals,

<sup>49</sup> *Reden*, Fichte, SW 7:392–3, 453–4, 384–8/*Addresses to the German Nation*, 126, 184, 118–120.

<sup>50</sup> *Reden*, Fichte, SW 7:453–4/*Addresses to the German Nation*, 184.

<sup>51</sup> In referring to the Germans as an *Urvolk*, or original people, Fichte drew on an old Lutheran tradition that held that the Germans were “elect” because they were the first to receive the true, purifying creed in a sea of corrupt papists.

<sup>52</sup> August-Wilhelm Schlegel is usually identified as the main source of Fichte’s language argument. See Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1924), 2:61–77; H. C. Engelbrecht, *Johann Gottlieb Fichte: A Study of His Political Writings with Special Reference to His Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 122–3.

he supported the revolution's initial liberating aims. By 1798 he began to worry about its impact abroad. In texts published posthumously under the title *The German Constitution* (1798–1802) Hegel first laid out some of the arguments developed in his mature thinking on the nation-state. The introduction opens by declaring that “in the war against the French Republic, Germany has found ... that it is no longer a state.” While the Reich's constitutional lawyers quibbled about the “rational Idea” of the state, Hegel spelled out the “tangible results” of France's punitive peace: “some of the finest German territories have been lost, together with several million of the country's inhabitants” while “a burden of debt ... prolongs the misery of war far into the peace.” Above all, “apart from those states which have come under the rule of the conquerors, and hence also of foreign laws and customs, many others will lose what is their highest good, namely their existence as independent states.”<sup>53</sup>

Hegel then cut through legal hair-splitting with his own concept of the state. “In order for a multitude to form a state, it is necessary to form a common means of defence and state power.”<sup>54</sup> This sentence highlights two distinctive features of Hegel's call for German unity: his insistence that unification had become a matter of “necessity” (*Notwendigkeit*) and his equally firm insistence that external defense was the basic purpose of states. Rather than adding yet another voice to the usual chorus of complaints about the Reich's bad luck, he wanted to show why its dissolution appeared necessary when it was understood as part of “a system of events ruled by a spirit.”<sup>55</sup> The spirit of recent European history had been moving away from small, jealously independent polities toward large ‘national states’ (*Nationalstaaten*). By clinging to their old particularisms, Germans contributed to their own plight. Hegel commended the love of liberty that deterred his countrymen from following other countries down a centralizing national path. But he insisted that the necessity imposed by wider developments now threatened to strangle German liberties. They could be saved, albeit in a different form, only if Germany followed the national pattern and created “a centre (*Mittelpunkt*) which is freely determined by laws and in which all powers are concentrated (irrespective of whether it assumes a truly monarchic form or that of a modern republic).”<sup>56</sup> Hegel used the term *Nationalstaat* in this text to mean

<sup>53</sup> *Die Verfassung Deutschlands*, Hegel, Werke 1:461–72; in *Hegel: Political Writings*, eds. Laurence Dickey and H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>54</sup> My trans. of the original: “Das eine Menge einen Staat bilde, dazu ist notwendig, daß sie eine gemeinsame Wehre und Staatsgewalt bilde”; Hegel, Werke 1:472. The most recent English translation renders this as “A mass of people can call itself a state only if it is united for the common defence of the totality of its property.” “German Constitution,” in *Political Writings*, 15. Like much English-language scholarship since the 1970s, this deliberately plays down the emphasis on military and political power in Hegel's early and later writings on the state.

<sup>55</sup> *Die Verfassung Deutschlands*, Hegel, Werke 1:464/*Political Writings*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Die Verfassung Deutschlands*, Hegel, Werke 1:550/*Political Writings*, 77.



simply a state with centralized means of force and power of enforcement, attributes that qualified states for full recognition within the emerging nation-state system. His overriding concern was to end the anarchy that was responsible for Germans' lately being "pillaged and abused"; his chief recommendation was to amalgamate "the whole military strength of Germany into a single army."<sup>57</sup> On the model of Machiavelli's famous call for Italian resistance in the last chapter of the *Prince*, Hegel ended the *German Constitution* by appealing to a Theseus-like conqueror to enforce unity where free self-legislative action had failed. Force was needed because the "common mass" of German people "know only the segregation of communities in Germany" and found the idea of unification "utterly alien."<sup>58</sup> He did not suggest that common culture was essential for a fully fledged national state. Like Fichte, he valued the variety of customs and laws preserved in the old Reich and sought to reconcile political unity with cultural diversity.

While the idea of historical *Notwendigkeit* remained in Hegel's later writings, the language of political and military force was toned down. In *The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law* (1802–3), Hegel criticized Fichte for relying too much on force to back political and legal reforms. But he also disliked Kant's distinction between the peremptory moral duties and provisional rights of states.<sup>59</sup> It seemed counterintuitive to Hegel that in an ethics committed to the expansion of reason, the rational claims of morality could not be backed by coercive means, while 'provisional' legal claims could. Already in the *German Constitution*, he had blamed an excessive deference to legality for discouraging creative thinking about how to reorganize Germany in line with the 'spirit' of the times.<sup>60</sup> In trying to bridge the gap between current legal rights and the demands of rational necessity, Hegel developed his historical account of how human reason expands in rising and falling cycles, eventually acquiring universal authority. Central to this account was the idea that the principal agents of rational moral development are 'peoples' (*Völker*). In *Natural Law* Hegel asserted that "the absolute ethical (*Sittliche*) totality is nothing other than a people." The concept of *Sittlichkeit*, usually translated as "ethical life," emerged in later writings as the cornerstone of Hegel's theory of political legitimacy. A word with strong Protestant overtones,

<sup>57</sup> *Die Verfassung Deutschlands*, Hegel, Werke 1:548–81/*Political Writings*, 77, 13, 98, 80.

<sup>58</sup> Hegel acknowledged Machiavelli's inspiration in the text, hailing the Florentine as a "statesman" who "grasped the necessary idea of saving Italy by uniting it into a single state." *Die Verfassung Deutschlands*, Hegel, Werke 1:552–8.

<sup>59</sup> *Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts*, Hegel, Werke 2:434–530; *The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 84–8, 124–5; 76–7, 92.

<sup>60</sup> *Verfassung*, Hegel, Werke 1:457–9/*Political Writings*, 7–8.

*Sittlichkeit* combined the higher virtues of a community of the faithful with the earthier bonds of custom, sentiment, and mutual trust. Idiosyncratically, Hegel placed *Sittlichkeit* at a higher stage in the development of reason than abstract, rule-governed *Moralität*. With this move he challenged the presumption that universalistic ethics must be more rational than concrete, particularistic forms, for *Sittlichkeit* could develop only in the life of particular peoples, and “the ethical vitality of a people lies precisely in the fact that the people has a shape in which a specific character is present.”<sup>61</sup>

Hegel wanted to show how the historically evolved virtues of particular communities could be the basis for a rational ethics. Like Herder, he argued that the particularity of peoples embodies an immanent ‘universality’ because the ‘world spirit’ needs diverse forms to express its universal essence; “it has enjoyed itself and its own essence in every nation under every system of laws and customs.”<sup>62</sup> This theory of history gave what Kant had called ‘absolute teleology’ a fundamental role in deciding which nations should form states and which nation-states were entitled to lead others. Hegel took it for granted that only peoples with a history of distinct political organization were entitled to their own states. “In the existence of a nation,” he wrote, “the substantial aim is to be a state and preserve itself as such. A nation with no state formation (a *mere* nation), has, strictly speaking, no history – like the nations which existed before the rise of states and others which still exist in a condition of savagery.”<sup>63</sup> In the following decades, similar criteria for ranking more and less ‘historical’ nations were proposed by republicans and liberals such as Giuseppe Mazzini and John Stuart Mill, as well as by Marx and Engels. For all the differences in their background theories of history, each of these authors derived criteria for unequal access to nation-statehood from teleological claims, presented as facts rather than hypotheses, about the ultimate goals of rational or providential development.<sup>64</sup> In this respect the main nineteenth-century philosophers of nationhood diverged from their late eighteenth-century predecessors. While they disagreed about the role of historical teleology in grounding moral principles, Kant and Herder both followed Rousseau in denying that any natural or historical basis could be found for ranking nations as more or less competent to have their own state or to set moral and political standards for others.

<sup>61</sup> *Naturrechts*, Hegel, Werke 2:495, 524/*Scientific Ways*, 92, 126–7.

<sup>62</sup> *Naturrechts*, Hegel, Werke 2:524/*Scientific Ways*, 126–7.

<sup>63</sup> *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III*, Hegel, Werke 10:350; *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 279.

<sup>64</sup> See Giuseppe Mazzini, *The Duties of Man and Other Essays* (London: J. M. Dent, 1907). On Marx and Engels, see Erica Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), chap. 4.

Moreover, the role Hegel assigned to nation-states in his theory of history pushed the *Weltgeist* in a sharply particularist direction. In the *Philosophy of Right* (1821) and his lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel argued that sovereign states in an international state of nature represented the highest development of human reason and *Sittlichkeit*. They were able to reach this pinnacle because of their exclusiveness or ‘individuality’ in relation to other states. Hegel invoked an idealized account of ancient patriotism according to which virtue springs from particularistic bonds, not from an abstract sense of humanity. For Hegel, the essential forms of this identity had no basis in prepolitical attributes such as language or religion. They were generated through common political life and sustained by the defensive needs of the state. Since national individuality depended on “awareness of one’s existence as a unit in sharp distinction from others” war was an indispensable means of strengthening this sense of identity. Hegel, therefore, praised the pagan warrior virtues of self-sacrifice and courage as assets to modern, rational states. War “has the higher significance that by its agency ... the ethical health of peoples is preserved,” whereas “corruption in nations would be the product of prolonged, let alone ‘perpetual,’ peace.”<sup>65</sup>

Against both Kant and Fichte, Hegel argued that the state of nature – and hence the state of war – was the permanent condition of relations among states. The “universal proviso of international law,” therefore, “does not go beyond an ought-to-be.” The statement that “in international relations [*das Verhältnis von Staaten*] we can never get beyond an ought”<sup>66</sup> might be read in two ways. ‘Never’ might mean for the rest of human history. Or it might mean that so long as international relations are relations among *states* according to Hegel’s ‘concept’, defined by their sovereign individuality and mutual suspicion, it is logically impossible for them to treat international peace as a regulative ideal. But Hegel did not suggest that world history could ever move beyond “the dialectic of several national minds” that constituted “the judgement of the world.”<sup>67</sup> To be sure, Hegel’s conception of ethical life was universalistic. In contrast to Herder’s cultural pluralism, it proposed standards of rational order that any modern state should strive to meet or risk becoming a “historyless” nation exposed to absorption by well-organized nation-states. However, though he defended universally valid norms of modern political order, Hegel refrained from endorsing the different kind of Enlightenment universalism proposed by Rousseau and Kant: one that exhorts all societies to put themselves under universal moral and legal restraints. His emphasis on the advantages of war for the ethical health of peoples

<sup>65</sup> *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Hegel, Werke 7:409–11; *Philosophy of Right*, trans T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 208–10.

<sup>66</sup> *Philosophie des Rechts*, Hegel, Werke 7:415–16, 498/*Philosophy of Right*, 213–14, 297.

<sup>67</sup> *Enzyklopädie*, Hegel, Werke 10:347/*Philosophy of Mind*, 277.

inflated the rights of nation-states in their external relations, while undermining restraints on their actions.

This, in turn, created a tension between his liberal and individualistic principles of *internal* political order and more collectivist virtues he saw as necessary in relations *among* modern states. Hegel never called for a strongly unitary form of national identity: the constitutional ideal outlined in his *Philosophy of Right* was balanced and pluralistic, and many of his positions on civil liberties were progressive. Nevertheless, the idea that a wide range of individual freedoms must be sacrificed to defend the state was deeply engraved in Hegel's national ethics. Maintaining the "independence and sovereignty of the state" was the individual's highest duty, "at the risk and the sacrifice of property and life, as well as of opinion and everything else naturally comprised in the compass of life."<sup>68</sup> These views were rooted not in authoritarian or ethnocentric attitudes, but in the concerns about international defense that had shaped Hegel's ideas about the nation-state since his youth.

#### J. S. MILL

During the 1848 revolutions, questions about access to nation-statehood were at the forefront of European political debates: Which peoples were entitled to have a nation-state, and which were not? If the principle of nationality was to be supported selectively, what criteria and what authority should determine whether and how to apply it? The most systematic treatment of these questions in the second half of the century was that of John Stuart Mill (1806–73). Mill's interest in national issues grew out of his lifelong engagement with political debates in Europe, especially in France. He claimed that this kept him "free from the error always prevalent in England ... of judging universal questions by a merely English standard."<sup>69</sup> As a young man he was attracted by "Germano-Coleridgean" doctrines that saw governments as rooted in organically grown national cultures.<sup>70</sup> Although Mill later lost his affection for this "naturalistic theory of politics," he never completely abandoned his early understanding of nationality as the product of morally significant cultural identities, which, in turn, were an important foundation of legitimacy in states.

<sup>68</sup> *Philosophie des Rechts*, Hegel, Werke 7:410/*Philosophy of Right*, 209.

<sup>69</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. John M. Robson (London: Penguin, 1989), 64.

<sup>70</sup> In an essay of 1840 Mill endorsed a benign, Herder-like ideal of national cohesion as a basic condition of sound government. He rejected "nationality in the vulgar sense of the term," which involved "senseless antipathy" to foreigners and assumed that this could be separated neatly from positive "principles of cohesion" based on "sympathy, not hostility." "Coleridge," in J. S. Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge, 1963–91) [henceforth Mill, CW], 10:133–5.

In 1848 the French foreign minister Lamartine proclaimed France's right to give military aid to any movement of subject nationalities in Europe. This public declaration of a crusading "principle of nationality" inspired heated debate. Its opponents pointed out that many separatist and unification national movements, such as those in Hungary and parts of Germany, used cultural coercion against minorities and unilateral force in asserting territorial claims. Mill's early and later discussions show his concern to defend aspirations for self-government, especially against oppressive empires, without encouraging ethnocentric nationalist excesses.<sup>71</sup> He achieved this difficult balance by laying out two sets of considerations to be weighed when judging national claims: permissive considerations, or reasons for taking those claims very seriously, and restrictive considerations, or reasons to deny certain peoples full or partial self-determination.

The bedrock of Mill's permissive case for national self-determination is a general moral and political principle that holds that "the question of government ought to be decided by the governed." A corollary of this principle is that where "the sentiment of nationality exists in any force, there is a *prima facie* case for uniting all the members" under a single government and "a government to themselves apart." In addition to principle and corollary, Mill offers two pragmatic political arguments for recognizing national claims and creating states based on a unitary national identity. First, it is easier for representative institutions to operate where a population shares a sense of nationality. Second, it is easier to maintain despotism in multinational states, because rulers can stir up antipathies between peoples in order to justify coercing all of them.<sup>72</sup>

Alongside this strong permissive case, Mill set out equally strong reasons why national claims cannot always be met. His most general restrictive argument is derived from experience, which showed that demands for national independence or unity were easily inflamed. Mill expressed his "regret, not to say disgust" at the view that "the sentiment of nationality so far outweighs the love of liberty, that people are willing to abet their rulers in crushing the liberty and independence of any people not of their own race and language."<sup>73</sup> Since the desire of one nation for representative government cannot justify policies that destroy other peoples' freedom, the principle of nationality must be carefully qualified and applied in ways that discourage excessive, uncompromising demands. Mill limited the force of the principle in two complementary ways. First, he suggested that specific national claims should be judged against a higher standard of utility, or the highest "interests of humanity."<sup>74</sup> Having argued that utility is best

<sup>71</sup> "Vindication of the French Revolution of February 1848," Mill, *CW* 20:347–8.

<sup>72</sup> Mill, "Considerations on Representative Government," in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 428–30.

<sup>73</sup> "Vindication," Mill, *CW* 20:347–8.

<sup>74</sup> Mill, "Representative Government," 217.

advanced by the expansion of individual liberty and forms of government that promote that liberty, he set out several conditions that peoples should meet in order to qualify for national independence. One condition was geopolitical: since countries like pre-Trianon Hungary had populations “so mixed up as to be incapable of local separation,” they must try “to make a virtue of necessity, and reconcile themselves to living together under equal rights and laws.” Another was the “purely moral and social consideration” of relative “backwardness.” If one of two neighboring nationalities “was originally an inferior and more backward portion of the human race,” Mill contended, then absorption by the other “is greatly to its advantage.” A Breton or Basque must surely prefer to have the advantages of French citizenship and international prestige rather “than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world.” If the more civilized nation was much smaller than the less advanced, like the English in India, assimilation was impossible. The more civilized should then “use their superiority” to try to prepare the conquered “for a higher stage of improvement,” including eventual self-government.<sup>75</sup> For Mill, then, national independence was “desirable as a means to the attainment of liberty” only among people who were ready for self-government. As for the unready, “it is often better for them to be under the despotism of foreigners than of natives, when those foreigners are more advanced in civilisation” than they.<sup>76</sup>

These arguments make it clear that Mill favored the formation of national *states* based on the gradual absorption of less advanced peoples over multinational states and empires. His arguments for national *self-determination* are more ambivalent. According to his general principles – representative government as a specification of utility – political legitimacy depends on the consent of the governed. But by setting very demanding conditions on peoples seeking representative government, Mill weakened the force of his commitment to representative government as a basic touchstone of legitimacy. When the different elements of his argument are weighed against each other, the decisive criterion determining whether a people is entitled to national independence is not the principle that the governed should decide questions of government; it is whether national independence for a particular people is deemed likely to lead humanity as a whole to “a higher stage of improvement.” For Mill utility involves both the advancement of human civilization and representative government, but the former is prior;

<sup>75</sup> Mill, “Representative Government,” 430–3, 453–4.

<sup>76</sup> “Vindication,” Mill, *CW* 20:347–8. Mill had evidently lost some of the Herder-like, egalitarian enthusiasm he expressed in 1840 for the “extraordinary height” of human culture, not just in Europe but even among “unmitigated savages, the wild Indians, and again the Chinese, the Egyptians, the Arabs,” who, he went on, “all had their own education, their own culture” and thus their own “national character.” “Coleridge,” Mill, *CW* 10:141.

representative government is simply its most important means. He, therefore, makes a teleological conception of humanity's higher purposes, not a principle of consent, the final arbiter of conflicts over the unification and boundaries of nation-states. It is true that he defined higher and lower civilizations in terms of liberty. But the consequentialist structure of his arguments implies that the liberty that counts most lies in the future not the present. Moreover, it involves the realization of particular ways of life specified in advance of peoples' choices, rather than protecting the rights of individuals or peoples to choose their own cultural or political orders. Although Mill sometimes recognized very strong reasons to avoid imposing free institutions on others,<sup>77</sup> he stopped well short of acknowledging a fundamental right of individuals or peoples to participate in deliberations about their political arrangements.

Most nineteenth-century Europeans believed in a hierarchy of civilized and backward peoples, and Mill's arguments must be read in this context. But the inequalitarian prejudices of his era were not the result of intellectual naïvete. They emerged in response to political and geopolitical conditions that had grown far more pronounced since the 1790s. Until the 1840s, discussions of the "national question" had focused on defining rights against conquest for stateless or dis-united peoples such as the Germans, Italians, Poles, or Hungarians. By the second half of the century, even the most principled debates about the rights of stateless peoples had become inseparable from questions about the relative power and international authority of established nation-states. Since international laws and institutions were too weak to define and apply principles of legitimacy, including the new principle of nationality, the governments of the most powerful states began to offer their services as premier international arbiter. As the century wore on, rivalries among top-ranking powers ensured that criteria for establishing new nation-states (and pecking orders) would be defined in conflicting, self-serving, and often uncompromising ways.

In the context of his times, then, the real blind spot in Mill's thinking was not Eurocentric arrogance, but overoptimistic expectations of civilized conduct among the major European states. Mill's conception of how civilization evolves and spreads was considerably less turbulent, dialectical, or bloody than that of most Continental thinkers. He assumed that rising national demands would somehow be weighed and balanced by an impartial club of top-ranking nation-states. Looking forward to the eventual fulfillment of "one of the most prominent wants of civilised society, a real International Tribunal," and more cautiously to the formation of a loose European federation,<sup>78</sup> Mill underestimated the depth

<sup>77</sup> Mill, "Representative Government," 243; "On Liberty" in *On Liberty*, 102.

<sup>78</sup> Mill, "Representative Government," 441; "Letter to T. E. Cliffe Leslie," 18 August 1860, 15 (703).

of current rivalries among the “Great Powers” that were supposed to spearhead these projects. Unlike his contemporaries Marx and Engels, he did not seem to realize that the national principle itself could become a plaything of liberal and despotic powers alike.<sup>79</sup> Instead he clung, against all evidence, to the belief that “the great interests of the civilised nations in the present age are not those of territorial attack and defence, but of liberty, just government, and sympathy of opinion.” This view was shared by others who tended to judge international questions by “English standard”—based British colonial and mercantile interests, as Mill did not entirely avoid doing.<sup>80</sup>

#### NATIONAL EMPIRES AND RADICAL NATIONALISM

Along with criteria for constituting viable nation-states, standards for membership in the international club of Great Powers shifted dramatically in the mid-1800s. It was no longer enough to have a modern constitution, industrializing economy, and system of mass education. An aspiring Great Power was now expected to have overseas colonies, increasingly subject to direct forms of control. The rivalries spawned by this emerging norm aroused fresh anxieties in top-ranked countries as well as those lower down the ranks. The Anglo-American ideal of a glorious nation achieving empire without enslaving others and civil freedom without fear of anarchy or invasion remained the Holy Grail of liberal nation makers within and beyond Europe. Grasping the Grail proved difficult, even in the happily situated lands where it was first espied. British and American national thinking was strongly influenced by Locke’s doctrines of civilization based on the productive use of land, doctrines often invoked to justify colonial expansion. Their advocates liked to contrast such arguments to the martial forms of expansionism that prevailed in Continental Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, it had become almost impossible to keep the two arguments apart. Britain’s *doux commerce* met with massive popular resistance in India and China, forcing British governments to deploy military force and move toward direct rule over hostile populations. In the rush for empire in the 1880s and 1890s, commercial rivalries were bound up with growing competition among nation-states. Ideologically, Great Power nationalism was two-faced. It opposed the imperial ambitions of other countries in the name of nationality but did not relinquish imperial aspirations for its own.

<sup>79</sup> Compare Marx’s cynical view of Lamartine’s nationality principle in Karl Marx, “English-French Mediation in Italy,” in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 7 (New York: International, 1975–; reprint, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2000), 481; and “The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850,” in *Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 98.

<sup>80</sup> “Vindication,” Mill, CW 20:346.



Anxieties about imperial-national standing tended to radicalize even liberal national thinking in top-ranking states. In 1847 one of Europe's most respected liberal thinkers, Alexis de Tocqueville, argued that although French colonial expansion in Algeria had aroused "blind hatred" among native Arab and Berber inhabitants, even harsher measures were needed to defend France's primary "national interest": to keep rival European powers out. Restraints on warfare that were observed when dealing with other Europeans must, he contended, be disregarded in the colonies. "For myself," Tocqueville admitted, "I think that all means of desolating these [native] tribes must be employed," including the "interdiction of commerce," and efforts "to ravage the country" by seizing men and herds and burning harvests.<sup>81</sup> Over the next few decades, radical nationalism acquired fresh fuel from the idea that nations corresponded to biological 'races', which formed a natural hierarchy of populations more and less fit to lead the others. Racist forms of thinking began to serve as one of the main ideological strategies of international positioning and repositioning and as a justification for aggressive imperialism. Far from being simply a radicalized version of defensive ethnocentrism or authoritarianism, racial thinking and radical nationalism could grow just as easily in countries with republican or liberal constitutions, especially if their proponents perceived international changes as threatening their national status. The last decades of the century witnessed the spread of racist thinking in political, military, and academic circles in France and Britain, reflecting anxieties about their ability to maintain top international status against newcomers like Germany and Japan. In a statement characteristic of the racial ideologies used to justify Western empire building Gilbert Murray, the British classical scholar and supporter of the League of Nations, explained in 1900:

There is in the world a hierarchy of races . . . those nations which eat more, claim more, and get higher wages, will direct and rule the others, and the lower work of the world will tend in the long run to be done by the lower breeds of men. This much we of the ruling colour will no doubt accept as obvious.<sup>82</sup>

It is important to keep a comparative international perspective in view when considering the rise of fin de siècle radical nationalism. Some aspects were fueled by authoritarian or socially "backward" conditions that prevailed in some countries. But extremist nationalism was nourished by wider intellectual and political developments that fostered radical national thinking in most front-ranked Western states.

<sup>81</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. and trans. Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 145, 70–1.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London: Tavistock, 1977), 96.

Above all, claims about the natural, political, or moral superiority of established Great Powers provoked resistance in less highly ranked nations to their inferior status. One of the clearest critiques of paternalistic doctrines of self-determination was that of a non-European disciple of Mill, the Japanese liberal philosopher Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901). In his *Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1874) Fukuzawa started by accepting Mill's distinctions between progressive and backward peoples. He placed the Japanese in the latter category and called for radical reforms to end his country's backwardness. The standard bearers of Western civilization were right, he wrote, to hold that only societies based on individualism and values of public education could be progressive. But they were wrong to decree that backward nations must be educated by the more civilized before they could claim independence. Respect for a people's independence was a precondition for securing progress in education and representative government, not just its outcome; measures taken toward advancement were unlikely to be seen as legitimate if they were imposed by outsiders. Mill and other Western liberals undermined their whole civilizing project, one that Fukuzawa strongly supported, by failing to realize "how evil, how hateful, how infuriating, and how painful imbalance of power is" and paying "lip service ... to equality of rights between nations," while their actions showed that "in reality the idea ... is unrealised."<sup>83</sup> Fukuzawa here invoked a distinction that had largely been lost in nineteenth-century philosophical discussions of nationhood, even the most reflective and humane: a distinction between the ideal ends specified by a doctrine of national legitimacy, on the one hand, and acceptable means of promoting national self-determination in non-ideal conditions.

In essence if not terminology, Fukuzawa was retrieving the antipaternalist and nonteological principles implied by Kant's doctrine of right and holding them up against Mill's selective doctrine of national liberties. He agreed with Mill that the ideal goals of nation building can and should be defined in terms of universal human rights or capacities. However, neither ends nor means should be imposed from without, since this would violate the autonomy of the persons and peoples who seek to determine their own political conditions. At the end of the nineteenth century, accelerating international rivalries made this strict right-based approach to national questions seem unworkable to many observers. It has acquired a fresh appeal in our own times, when two centuries of nation building and national self-assertion seem to affirm Kant's hypothesis that "the will to subjugate others or to grow at their expense is always present" in human affairs and

<sup>83</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* [*Bunmeiron no gairyaku*], trans. David A. Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1970), 171–98.

that, therefore, the “only possible way”<sup>84</sup> to restrain national egoism is to establish a condition of international right.

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<sup>84</sup> “Über den Gemeinspruch,” Kant, Ak 8:312/*Political Writings*, 91–2.

## NINETEENTH-CENTURY IDEALS: SELF-CULTURE AND THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

DANIEL BRUDNEY

It was a nineteenth-century commonplace – though perpetually proclaimed as a disturbing discovery – that the new commercial, industrial, and democratic civilization was producing a debased form of human being and human life. Here, for instance, is Matthew Arnold on the Puritan middle class: “It presents a defective type of religion, a narrow range of intellect and knowledge, a stunted sense of beauty, a low standard of manners”;<sup>1</sup> and Friedrich Engels on the condition of the working class in Manchester: “If any one wishes to see ... how little of civilization [a human being] may share and yet live, it is only necessary to travel hither”;<sup>2</sup> and John Stuart Mill on his contemporaries: “their human capacities are withered and starved”;<sup>3</sup> finally, Thoreau: “We live meanly, like ants.”<sup>4</sup>

The complaints were multiple: that agents are pressed into a single mold (Emerson: “Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold citations are given by the title of the work and then the volume and page number in Matthew Arnold, *The Works of Matthew Arnold in Fifteen Volumes* (London: MacMillan, 1903–4) [henceforth *Works*]. See Matthew Arnold, “Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism” (1878), *Works* 10:97. See also Matthew Arnold, *Friendship’s Garland* (1871), *Works* 6:378: “Your middle-class man thinks it the highest pitch of development and civilization when his letters are carried twelve times a day from Islington to Camberwell, and from Camberwell to Islington, and if railway-trains run to and fro between them every quarter of an hour. He thinks it is nothing that the trains only carry him from an illiberal, dismal life at Islington to an illiberal, dismal life at Camberwell; and the letters only tell him that such is the life there.”

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels citations are given by the title of the work and then the volume and page number, first in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx Engels Werke*, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (Berlin: Dietz, 1956) [henceforth Marx, MEW; “E, i” stands for *Ergänzungsband*, vol. 1], and then in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx, Engels: Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975–) [henceforth Marx, CW]. See Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (1845), Marx, MEW 2:285/Marx, CW 4:355. The translation may be amended.

<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill citations are given by the title of the work and then the volume and page number in John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–91) [henceforth Mill, CW]. See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859), Mill, CW 18:265.

<sup>4</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854) (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 74.

one of its members.... The virtue in most request is conformity”);<sup>5</sup> about the despotism of public opinion (Mill: “In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship”);<sup>6</sup> about the obsessive pursuit of money (Carlyle: “Cash Payment has become the sole nexus of man to man”);<sup>7</sup> and about the absence of social solidarity (de Tocqueville: “I see an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls. Each one of them, withdrawn into himself, is almost unaware of the fate of the rest”).<sup>8</sup>

From these standard jeremiads of the age, let us take two: agents lack proper connection with and concern for others, and as specimens of humanity they are a paltry lot. And let us take the corresponding positive ideals: that of the agent who has the right kind of connection to others and that of the agent who represents an impressively developed form of individual human life. Put thus abstractly, these ideals are age-old. As we shall see, however, their nineteenth-century forms are quite grand, even excessive, as if taking to heart Ludwig Feuerbach’s midcentury remark that “only the final, uttermost degree, only the *extreme*, is always the truth.”<sup>9</sup>

The passages quoted above reveal a brutal pessimism about the present. Yet with the writers to be examined this coexists with a buoyant optimism about the future. They have little sense of human limits, something manifest in many places (e.g., Marx’s early writings) and succinctly expressed in John Morley’s 1874 remark on Mill: “No other element played so important a part in [Mill’s] moral and social thinking as a conviction of the immense and at present inconceivable

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (1841), in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971–), 2:29.

<sup>6</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:264.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Carlyle, “Chartism” (1839), in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (New York: Scribner, 1896–1901), 29:164.

<sup>8</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1990), 2:265; *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), vol. 2, pt. 4, chap. 6, 691–2. The passage is from the final volume, published in 1840. More vituperatively, Bruno Bauer claims that the pursuit of money in civil society consists in “petrification” in “narrow-minded work.” In civil society, he says, “everyone utilizes everyone else to satisfy his own needs, and he in turn is utilized by others for the same purpose.” See Bruno Bauer, *The Jewish Problem (Die Judenfrage, 1843)*, trans. Helen Lederer, in *The Young Hegelians*, ed. Lawrence Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 192.

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Glaubens im Sinne Luthers: Ein Beitrag zum “Wesen des Christentums”* (1844), in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Werner Schuffenhauer (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1967) [hereafter Feuerbach, GW], 9:356; *The Essence of Faith According to Luther*, trans. Melvin Chernob (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 36 (emphasis in original). Bruno Bauer says something similar in 1843: “Only truth is extreme.” See Bauer, ““Einleitung in die Dogmengeschichte” von Theodor Kliesoth,” in *Anekdoten zur neuesten deutschen Philosophie und Publicistik*, ed. Arnold Ruge (Zurich: Literarischen Comptoirs, 1843), 2:155.

pitch to which human happiness is capable of being raised by the exertion of reason and the strengthened practice of social devotion.”<sup>10</sup> That the ideals of many nineteenth-century thinkers (not just philosophers but also critics, novelists, poets) are so immodest – that so many have such great expectations – is to my mind what makes them so interesting.

I sketch the two nineteenth-century ideals, show that they were widespread, and point to their ambitious scope and historical specificity. I then briefly discuss some contemporary criticisms of these ideals (after all, the nineteenth century was at least as disputatious as any other). Finally, I examine whether, as some writers hoped, the two ideals could be combined. The answer is uncertain. The issue concerns human psychology, specifically, the psychology of future human beings. About that, many a nineteenth-century thinker urges us to be hopeful or, failing that, to be silent. In the end, I express skepticism. Toward the close of the eighteenth century, Wilhelm von Humboldt writes that “for as truth is never found conflicting with truth in the domain of intellect, so too in the region of morality there is no opposition between things really worthy of human nature.”<sup>11</sup> Even in the most ideal of ideal conditions, that is not, I think, likely to be the case.

## I

As so often in the century’s intellectual life, Mill can be the touchstone. I use his texts to stake out the two ideals.

The chapter “Of Individuality” in *On Liberty* presents a picture of the sort of life it would be best for a human being to lead. It presents an ideal of the person, an outline of the general form of the dispositions, desires, and kinds of decision making that would represent a significant human achievement. “Our desires and impulses should be our own,” Mill says, not those imposed by others’ opinions.<sup>12</sup> Mill praises “eccentricity” and advocates “experiments of living” and “varieties of character.”<sup>13</sup> And he endorses Humboldt’s assertion that the “end of man ... is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.”<sup>14</sup> In line with this, he compares the fully realized individual to a work of art.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> John Morley, “Mr. Mill’s Three Essays on Religion,” *Fortnightly Review* 22 (1874): 648, reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 183. Morley goes on to remark that “this is the key alike to the *Liberty*, the *Utilitarianism*, and to some of the most original chapters in the *Political Economy*.”

<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action* (1791–2) (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), 27.

<sup>12</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:263.

<sup>13</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:269, 261.

<sup>14</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:261. The quoted passage is from Humboldt, *Limits of State Action*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:263, 266.

These remarks are not all of a piece (e.g., a work of art is often thought to have a unity that excludes mere eccentricity). Still, we can extract an intelligible ideal. It is of the person who exercises what she autonomously judges to be her valuable capacities, pursues what she autonomously judges to be her valuable interests, and integrates these exercises and pursuits into a life as a whole. Moreover, in the course of such a life, not only are skills developed (to throw the javelin, to do arcane math); so are the person's "desires and impulses." She develops a character, becomes a particular kind of person. I call this *the ideal of self-development*, where the emphasis should be on both "self" and "development." The agent is developed but the choices of how and in which ways to develop are made by the agent herself.

There are three limitations to this presentation:

(1) The ideal of self-development does not cover all of Mill's remarks. He talks (i) of being unique, (ii) of ignoring the crowd, (iii) of attaining a standard of perfection that involves a harmonious self-construction, (iv) of being a work of art, and (v) of displaying vigor and energy. Strictly speaking, (i) is irrelevant to self-development. One could be unique without the autonomous development of one's capacities; nor does autonomy entail uniqueness. But presumably Mill believes, plausibly enough, that any individual who vigorously exercises autonomously chosen capacities and vigorously pursues autonomously chosen interests will in fact be unique. (ii) and (iii) are key to self-development. One's choices are to be one's own, and development is to be development of the whole person. This will, of course, involve development of this and that aspect of the person, but what is to be developed is the overall human being ("It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it").<sup>16</sup> I see no reason, however, why harmony here need involve more than an absence of internal conflict. And as that might not be beautiful, the self-developer need not be a work of art.<sup>17</sup> Finally, energy is crucial to Mill. He strongly favors "the striving, go-ahead character."<sup>18</sup> What the modern age needs, he says, is "bold, free expansion in all directions."<sup>19</sup>

(2) Other writers stress some of these elements. Emerson famously insists on the virtue of self-reliance ("the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd

<sup>16</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:263.

<sup>17</sup> A long aesthetic tradition sees harmony as a necessary condition for something to be a work of art. My point is that it is not a sufficient condition. (I thank Sandra Macpherson for helpful comments on this topic.) The self-developer, incidentally, might be an impressive instance of the human species, and if Mill's aesthetic criterion is not beauty but impressiveness, then she *would* be a work of art.

<sup>18</sup> *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), Mill, CW 19:409.

<sup>19</sup> *Diary*, February 6, 1854, Mill, CW 27:651.

keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude")<sup>20</sup> while Arnold gives a characterization of perfection ("a harmonious expansion of *all* the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature") that descends from Goethe and sounds surprisingly similar to Marx's and Engels's ("The vocation, designation, task of every person is to achieve the all-round development of all his abilities").<sup>21</sup> Arnold also agrees with Mill on the importance of developing a character. Perfection, he says, "consists in becoming something rather than in having something."<sup>22</sup> And Oscar Wilde echoes the point. "The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is."<sup>23</sup> There are also adherents – Wilde, Nietzsche, Thoreau – of the idea that one ought to make oneself into a work of art.<sup>24</sup> And many writers, even Mill's antagonist James Fitzjames Stephen, deplore the "prevalence of a narrow and mean type of character; the decay of energy; the excessive devotion to a petty ideal of personal comfort."<sup>25</sup> In a famous speech at the very end of the century, Theodore Roosevelt, then governor of New York, gives a kind of official endorsement to the energetic, striving character or, as he puts it, to "the strenuous life."<sup>26</sup>

(3) Finally, there is something that Mill does not refer to but that might be thought implicit in his talk of autonomy, energy, and uniqueness. An agent could be autonomous in the sense of making her own choices, energetic in the sense of acting with energy, and also snowflake unique – and yet not be the kind of individual Mill demands. What would be lacking would be a basic sense of oneself as

<sup>20</sup> Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Collected Works*, 2:31.

<sup>21</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), *Works* 6:12, and Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845–6), Marx, MEW 3:273/Marx, CW 5:292 (emphasis in original). Earlier, in 1844, Marx asserts something along the same lines: "The *rich* human being is simultaneously the human being in *need* of a totality of human manifestations of life." See *Manuscripts*, Marx, MEW E, i, 544/Marx, CW 3:304 (emphasis in original). A similar remark is also made later in *Capital* (1867). See *Capital*, vol. 1, Marx, MEW 23:512/Marx, CW 35:490–1.

<sup>22</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, *Works* 6:13.

<sup>23</sup> Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891), in *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose* (London: Penguin, 2001), 132. See also Emerson, "The American Scholar" (1837), in *Collected Works*, 1:65: "The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man."

<sup>24</sup> Mill hopes that each human being will make himself into "a noble and beautiful object of contemplation." See *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:266. Similarly, Thoreau likens the construction of the self to an aesthetic creation deserving of contemplation: "It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue [but] . . . to affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour"; *Walden*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> See Leslie Stephen, *The Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen* (London: Smith, Elder, 1895), 314.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," Speech before the Hamilton Club, Chicago, April 10, 1899, reprinted in Roosevelt, *Letters and Speeches* (New York: Library of America, 2004). And there is an official rejection of the opposite view of life, "the doctrine of ignoble ease."



choosing for oneself and *as* acting with energy or, better, with passion. I have in mind an attentiveness to the self and its commitments as distinct from immersion in the thousand details of daily life, a sense of oneself as a self, as having one's own distinct relation to the world. In *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Conrad's narrator, Marlow, says, "I don't like work – no man does – but I like what is in the work – the chance to find yourself. Your own reality – for yourself, not for others – what no other man can ever know."<sup>27</sup> This thought that one is not merely different from others but that one has – and should discover (or perhaps invent) – one's own reality, one's own way of being, is sufficiently widespread to warrant adding it to the self-development ideal.

The self-development ideal is clearly tied to the rise of something called "the individual" that is itself correlated with the rise of something called "modernity." And the ideal has an obvious ancestor in the renaissance ideal of the "all-sided man" or *l'uomo universale*, what Burckhardt describes in 1860 as "the harmonious development of one's spiritual and material existence";<sup>28</sup> perhaps its ancestry goes as far back as Aristotle's great-souled man. However, to get at its historical specificity I want to press a contrast between the self-development ideal as one finds it in Mill, Arnold, and other mid-nineteenth-century thinkers and the more demure ideal espoused by some canonical eighteenth-century philosophers. Consider here such a representative figure as David Hume's Cleanthes, that embodiment of all the virtues in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). Cleanthes is a genial and engaging man, has borne up cheerfully under adversity, is unfailingly kind and fair to others, and has a promising career ahead of him.<sup>29</sup> He is "a man of honour and humanity" – truly an admirable fellow.<sup>30</sup> Consider also another literary character, Denis Diderot's philosopher in *Rameau's Nephew*.<sup>31</sup> He, too, is a figure of genuine even if conventional virtue. He is honest, intelligent, aesthetically sensitive, not too sententious – note that he does not advise the scapegrace Rameau to change his life – and envious only of something worth envying, Voltaire's campaign on behalf of the Calas family. These are decidedly good men. Yet there is in them no restless sense of the need to strive ever forward, none of Mill's desired "bold, free expansion in all directions." Stock phrases from the nineteenth century – Browning's "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?",

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Signet Classic, 1997), 99.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 97.

<sup>29</sup> See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 73.

<sup>30</sup> Hume, *Enquiry*, 73.

<sup>31</sup> The date of the dialogue's composition is uncertain, though it must be in the 1760s or 1770s. For a discussion, see the introduction to Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew and D'Alembert's Dream* (New York: Penguin, 1966).

Tennyson's "I will drink / Life to the lees"<sup>32</sup> – would find no echo in them. Byron would hold no appeal.

Note that at issue is not the embrace of hard work. That is characteristic of the Victorian era (and is shared by figures as various as Conrad's Marlow and the 1844 Marx) but hardly unique to it. Benjamin Franklin, for instance, stresses the doctrine of work, but his conception of the virtues is even less Byronic than Hume's or Diderot's.<sup>33</sup> It is the later century's scope of aspiration that is different.

Arthur Lovejoy argues that the eighteenth century condemns the thought that the individual (or even the species as a whole) should aspire to godlike status. That century's criticism of pride, he says, is criticism of just such an aspiration. Lovejoy quotes Pope: "Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes, / Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods." Instead, Pope claims, "The bliss of Man (could Pride that blessing find) / Is not to act or think beyond mankind."<sup>34</sup>

But the nineteenth century is nowhere near so modest. When Browning asks, "Or what's a heaven for?" the answer is that the reason to have a heaven is precisely to have a goal to aim for. Or take Kurtz, from *Heart of Darkness*. Many a nineteenth-century literary protagonist has excessive aspirations (e.g., Julien Sorel, Raskolnikov), but Kurtz's go the furthest. He is not merely a well-rounded man but a "universal genius"<sup>35</sup> and in some way is supposed to be a representative figure ("All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz").<sup>36</sup> And he has a decided yen to make himself a god. Conrad's text mingles horror and mockery at such hubris; my point is that Kurtz's megalomania is of his time. Eighteenth-century villains are neither so grand nor so grandiose.

Of course, such a century-versus-century contrast is too pat. The strains I highlight in this and the next section appear in at least precursory (and perhaps more than that) form in the eighteenth century; for instance, Rousseau famously insists on his own individuality. On the other hand, in his time Rousseau is an outlier, and even his various ideal figures (the savage man, Émile, Wolmar) are narrow and sedate compared to Sorel or Raskolnikov or Kurtz – or even to Dorothea Brooke

<sup>32</sup> Robert Browning, "Andrea del Sarto" (1855) (reprinted in *My Last Duchess and Other Poems*, [New York: Dover, 1993]), ll. 97–8, and Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses" (1842) (reprinted in *Idylls and the King and a Selection of Poems* [New York: New American Library, 2003]), ll. 6 and 7.

<sup>33</sup> See Franklin's list of the virtues in Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography*, in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Albert Henry Smyth (New York: Haskell House, 1970), 1:327–8.

<sup>34</sup> See Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Pride in Eighteenth Century Thought," in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1948), 62–8. The passages from Pope are on 65. They are from Pope's *Essay on Man* (1744), Epistle I, ll. 125–6, 189–90. The condemnation of pride also explains Pope's handling of the theodicy issue, in Epistle II, ll. 1–2: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; / The proper study of Mankind is Man."

<sup>35</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 98.

<sup>36</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 127.

in *Middlemarch*. The yearning to do and/or to be something great appears before the nineteenth century but only then does it become pervasive.

Now, no nineteenth-century writer endorses straightforward immorality or self-divinizing. And writers' conceptions of the ideal person are not identical (e.g., Arnold and Wilde put in more Goethe than does Mill – less insistence on energy and more on symmetry of character).<sup>37</sup> But what is common is a stress on something missing in both Cleanthes and Diderot's philosopher, the aspiration for the *very* large development of the self. "Self-culture," says one of Wilde's characters, speaking, it seems, for the author, is "the true ideal of man."<sup>38</sup> Perhaps this is just a way to talk of the effect of romanticism. The point to keep in mind is the great scope of the nineteenth-century ideal of self-development

## II

Mill's second ideal of the person can be found in *Utilitarianism* (1861), chapter 3. There, Mill explains that the actions of the proper utilitarian agent would be motivated partly by conscience but primarily by sympathy, that is, by identification with the pleasures and pains of other human beings – at the limit, with those of all other human beings. Such an agent would gladden and sadden with (all) others, would "identify his *feelings* more and more with their good," and so have a direct motive to promote universal happiness.<sup>39</sup> At the limit, he would care about the human species in general, would, as I shall say, *strongly identify* with it.

Mill is convinced that this is a genuine psychological possibility. He says of Auguste Comte's *Traité de politique positive* that

it has superabundantly shown the possibility of giving to the service of humanity, even without the aid of belief in a Providence, both the psychical power and the social efficacy of a religion; making it take hold of human life, and colour all thought, feeling, and action, in a manner of which the greatest ascendancy ever exercised by any religion may be but a type and foretaste.<sup>40</sup>

This echoes a claim from Mill's earlier essay "Utility of Religion." For the devotees of the "Religion of Humanity," Mill says there, "the sense of unity with

<sup>37</sup> In "The Critic as Artist," Wilde puts his endorsement of Goethe into the mouth of a character in a dialogue, but the character seems to speak for Wilde: "The immediate debt that we owe to Goethe is greater than the debt we owe to any man since Greek days"; "The Critic as Artist," from *Intentions* (1891), in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, 258–9. Compare this with Mill's *Diary* remarks against Goethe; see *Diary*, February 6, 1854, Mill, CW 27:651. For an interesting discussion of the two variants of the self-development ideal, see Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), 287.

<sup>38</sup> Wilde, "Critic as Artist," 258.

<sup>39</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:231 (emphasis in original).

<sup>40</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:232.

mankind, and deep feeling for the general good, may be cultivated into a sentiment and a principle capable of fulfilling every important function of religion and itself justly entitled to the name.”<sup>41</sup>

The ideal, then, is of a person who cares deeply about humanity. Her thoughts and feelings are carried out of herself and fixed “on an unselfish object, loved and pursued as an end for its own sake.”<sup>42</sup> In such love and pursuit the agent finds her own satisfaction, Mill says in *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (1865), so that her altruism involves no sacrifice (“We should regard working for the benefit of others as a good in itself ... we should desire it for its own sake”).<sup>43</sup> Moreover, while Mill insists that such concern for others should be for its own sake, its presence in fact yields a large reward. “If the Religion of Humanity were as sedulously cultivated as the supernatural religions are ... all who had received the customary amount of moral cultivation would up to the hour of death live ideally in the life of those who are to follow them”<sup>44</sup> – one would receive a psychologically satisfying substitute for personal immortality. Strong identification with humanity thus provides a second picture of the sort of life it would be good for a human being to lead.<sup>45</sup>

In England and France, the major advocates of the strong identification ideal are Mill and Comte, and through them it is influential to the end of the century.<sup>46</sup> That one should live for others – in Comte’s standard phrase, “*vivre pour autrui*” – is a frequent demand.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> “Utility of Religion,” Mill, CW 10:422. This essay was written between 1850 and 1858. For Mill’s commitment to the religion of humanity, see W. M. Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), 190.

<sup>42</sup> “Utility of Religion,” Mill, CW 10:422.

<sup>43</sup> *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, Mill, CW 10:340. Here, Mill is actually describing Comte’s views, but a few sentences later he explicitly endorses them.

<sup>44</sup> “Utility of Religion,” Mill, CW 10:426.

<sup>45</sup> The strong identification ideal goes beyond merely complying with the utilitarian standard of conduct. On this topic, see pp. 754 of this chapter.

<sup>46</sup> Mill agrees with much in Comte but is also highly critical on many points; e.g., in *On Liberty* he remarks of Comte’s *System of Positive Polity* that it “aims at establishing (though by moral more than by legal appliances) a despotism of society over the individual, surpassing anything contemplated in the political ideal of the most rigid disciplinarian among the ancient philosophers”; *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:227. There are similar remarks in the *Autobiography*. In *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, Mill is generous in praising aspects of Comte’s views but also points out how inimical they are to individuality. For an extensive discussion of Comte’s impact in France, England, and Germany, see Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Auguste Comte, *Système de politique positive; ou, Traité de sociologie instituant la religion de l’humanité*, vol. 1 (1851), in *Oeuvres d’Auguste Comte* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1969) [henceforth Comte, *Oeuvres*], 7:700/*System of Positive Polity or Treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity*, trans. John Henry Bridges (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968) 1:566. In Comte, there are two dimensions to living for others. There are both (a) identification with those who are to come and (b) the hope that one will be a point of identification for those who are to come. Mill highlights (a); Comte makes heavier weather of (b). If one has done something great for humanity, one will be remembered and so “live on” in others’ memories.

A German line, that of the Young Hegelians, arrives at similar results. The 1844 Marx writes that true communists (like Mill's utilitarians) would take pleasure in others' pleasures. Under communism, Marx says, "the senses and enjoyment of other human beings have become my *own* appropriation," and "the affirmation of the object by another is likewise one's own enjoyment."<sup>48</sup> Your enjoyment becomes mine, gives me satisfaction.<sup>49</sup> Although Marx uses neither the concept of sympathy nor the terminology of pleasures and pains, agents under communism would in fact feel one another's pleasures (and their pains, were they to have any) and be gladdened (and saddened) by them.

Another Young Hegelian, Ludwig Feuerbach, affirms the idea of immortality via identification with the species. In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach declares, "He therefore who lives in the consciousness of the species as a reality, regards his existence for others, his public, his socially useful existence, as that existence which is one with the existence of *his* nature – as his immortal existence. He lives with his whole soul, with his whole heart, for humanity."<sup>50</sup> As with Mill, personal immortality is abandoned but identification with the ongoing species is a satisfactory substitute.

The religion of humanity can be seen from two perspectives. In the Feuerbachian vein, it is a way to grasp the underlying, that is, the "true" meaning of religious, especially Christian, belief. We (humanity) have worshipped an entity that was in fact merely ourselves (humanity) cast in a transcendent form. To recognize this is to recognize one's freedom from divine commands. It is also to recognize that the meaning of life is not gone: to replace God with humanity is not to assert an absence of meaning but to give a new interpretation of the meaning that has always been there. Feuerbach wants us to take predicates (e.g., omniscience) that have been projected onto a transcendent entity and see that they really belong to humanity as a whole. We are to see that God can be brought down to earth, embodied in the human species. And the aspiration to become closer to God is to turn into the aspiration to become closer to the human species. Call this a vertical move.

Mill's move is horizontal. He wants us to expand our sense of ourselves, to come to see ourselves as sharing a nature across the species, and so to come to identify our feelings "with the entire life of the human race."<sup>51</sup> Carlyle famously

<sup>48</sup> *Manuscripts*, Marx, MEW E, i, 540/Marx, CW 3:300; Marx, MEW E, i, 563/Marx, CW 3:322 (emphasis in original). See also "Comments on James Mill," Marx, MEW E, i, 459/Marx, CW 3:225, and Marx, MEW E, i, 462–3/Marx, CW 3:227–8.

<sup>49</sup> For a more developed account of these phrases, see my *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, ed. Werner Schuffenhauer (1841, rev. 1843, rev. 1849) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1956), 269; *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 171 (translation amended, emphasis in original).

<sup>51</sup> "Utility of Religion," Mill, CW 10:420.

remarks that his is “an age at once destitute of faith and terrified at skepticism.”<sup>52</sup> Humanity is not the only proposed replacement for religion (art is a rival), but it has the virtue of significant size and greatness: “It offers to the imagination and sympathies,” Mill says, “a large enough object to satisfy any reasonable demand for grandeur of aspiration.”<sup>53</sup> What is more, its consolations are offered to all. “This noble capability [to identify with humanity as a whole] implies indeed a certain cultivation, but not superior to that which might be, and certainly will be if human improvement continues, the lot of all.”<sup>54</sup> The universal church can be given a new and mundane form.

(For an interesting link between Feuerbach and Mill here, incidentally, we can turn to George Eliot. She translated Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*, knew Comte’s work, and was part of a circle, including Mill, that concerned itself with the religion of humanity. In her poem “O May I Join the Choir Invisible” [1874]) she characterizes the “life to come” in Comtean terms, closing with the hope “So shall I join the choir invisible / Whose music is the gladness of the world.”<sup>55</sup> Like Feuerbach and Mill, she urges that a life lived for others [for “the multitude / Divinely human”]<sup>56</sup> is a form of immortality. “So to live,” she says, “is heaven.”<sup>57</sup>)

As with the ideal of self-development, that of strong identification is historically specific. Stefan Collini points out a difference between eighteenth-century “benevolence” and nineteenth-century “altruism.”<sup>58</sup> The former tends to be personal, a concern for those one actually knows. In the nineteenth century, however, such concern dramatically expands its scope: the altruist is concerned not just for friends nearby but for distant, unknown others.<sup>59</sup>

In a mid-eighteenth-century novel, *Tom Jones* (1749), the narrator declares that “there is in some (I believe in many) human breasts a kind and benevolent disposition, which is gratified by contributing to the happiness of others.” Now although the narrator mentions “general philanthropy,” his focus is on the delights to be taken from “friendship ... [and] parental and filial affection,” that is, from substantially personal affections.<sup>60</sup> This is consistent with Hume’s

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Carlyle, “Sir Walter Scott,” in *Works*, 29:49.

<sup>53</sup> “Utility of Religion,” Mill, *CW* 10:420.

<sup>54</sup> “Utility of Religion,” Mill, *CW* 10:420–1.

<sup>55</sup> George Eliot, “O May I Join the Choir Invisible” (reprinted in *A George Eliot Miscellany: A Supplement to Her Novels* [Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1982], ll. 43–4).

<sup>56</sup> Eliot, “O May I Join the Choir Invisible,” ll. 28–9.

<sup>57</sup> Eliot, “O May I Join the Choir Invisible,” l. 10. For a discussion of Eliot and the religion of humanity, see Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century*, 212–13.

<sup>58</sup> See Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 66–7.

<sup>59</sup> See Collini, *Public Moralists*, 60–1. The term “altruism,” itself, Collini notes, was coined by Comte and assimilated into English through his work.

<sup>60</sup> Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1991), vol. 1, pt. 6, chap. 1, 204. The narrator is dealing with the common eighteenth-century question

examples of benevolence in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, for instance, a mother with her sick child or a friend who needs one's "patronage and protection."<sup>61</sup> By 1827, however, one of Bulwer Lytton's characters can remark that he "glowed with philanthropy" for those he did not know;<sup>62</sup> and two decades later, Robert Wilberforce affirms that Jesus "first taught the lessons of universal Philanthropy."<sup>63</sup> A concern for others has become universal and impersonal, and loving thy neighbor has become loving those far away.

Andrew Wernick offers a sociological explanation for this change: the goal of universal fellowship is an old one, but nineteenth-century economic and industrial development makes it seem a real possibility.<sup>64</sup> "For Comte, as for liberals and socialists, industrialism was creating the real conditions, both material and moral, for a worldwide order to be finally established. So the furthest possible extension of the social tie based on group, rather than individual, attachment could already be practically envisaged."<sup>65</sup> In a similar vein, Feuerbach claims that humanity is at last in a position to understand – and so to make conscious and actual – its fundamental unity because the real features of our lives ("our fire and life insurance companies, our railroads and steam-carriages ... military and industrial schools") manifest that unity,<sup>66</sup> manifest that we are reciprocally dependent on one another rather than on any transcendent entity.

It is not that the eighteenth century had no conception of a concern for distant others. One finds it clearly in the British moral sense theorists (e.g., Hutcheson claims that "there is a universal determination to benevolence in mankind, even toward the most distant parts of the species"),<sup>67</sup> but the difference in degree amounts to a difference in kind. The British moralists stress that the motivational force of benevolence is comparatively weak when the object is not near and dear but far off and unknown. It weakens with distance, Hutcheson says, in the same way as the force of "gravitation,"<sup>68</sup> and Hume insists that although

of whether all affection for others is not at bottom mere self-love. The idea of a dramatically enlarged and motivationally strongly efficacious concern for distant others is not at issue.

<sup>61</sup> Hume, *Enquiry*, 91–2.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Falkland* (Exeter: J. & B. Williams, 1843), 16. The novel was first published in 1827.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Holy Baptism* (Philadelphia: H. Hooker, 1850). See the entry for "philanthropy" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>64</sup> Thus there is something misleading in Mill's official assertion that we do most good when we make benevolence local. See *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:220.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 130.

<sup>66</sup> Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 30; *Essence of Christianity*, xlv, translation amended.

<sup>67</sup> Francis Hutcheson, "An Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good" (1725), in *British Moralists, 1650–1800*, ed. D. D. Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1:289; see also 266 and 282. See also Adam Smith, *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976), 235.

<sup>68</sup> Hutcheson, "An Inquiry," 290.

our sympathies are extensive, our readiness for benevolent action is quite “confined.”<sup>69</sup> By contrast, for the religionists of humanity the point is precisely that such impersonal concern *can* have great motivating force, equivalent to that of a religion. Mill criticizes Comte on many counts but he praises Comte’s presentation of the religion of humanity for “making much clearer, than to me they ever were before, the grounds for believing that the *culte de l’humanité* is capable of fully supplying the place of a religion.”<sup>70</sup> And Mill asserts that “in an improving state of the human mind, the influences are constantly on the increase which tend to generate in each individual a feeling of unity with all the rest; which feeling, if perfect, would make him never think of, or desire, any beneficial condition for himself, in the benefits of which they are not included.”<sup>71</sup> Comte, himself, declares that in the positivist future “Life in all its actions and thoughts is brought under the control and inspiring charm of social sympathy.”<sup>72</sup> And he says that “so long as the germs [of benevolent feelings] are there, their natural capacity for almost infinite development by social relations necessarily supplies them with continuous life in every situation fit for awakening them.”<sup>73</sup> Mill does urge us to focus our benevolence on what is local, but this is not because he believes that we cannot be motivated by a concern for humanity as a whole but merely because he thinks that we can be most effective at the local level.<sup>74</sup>

The insistence that unity with others would make one desire only benefits in which others share indicates that – as we have seen with Mill – living for others is supposed to be no sacrifice. But for Hume it is precisely because benevolent action is in some sense a sacrifice that the human tendency to it is “confined.”<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), bk. 3, pt. 2, sec. 2, 495. See also *Treatise*, bk. 3, pt. 2, sec. 1, 481. Smith says that our responsibilities are more limited than our sentiments: “The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers and to the narrowness of his comprehension; the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country”; Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 237.

<sup>70</sup> Letter to John Pringle Nichol, September 30, 1848, Mill, CW 13:738–9.

<sup>71</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:232.

<sup>72</sup> *Système de Politique Positive*, vol. 1, Comte, Oeuvres 7:321/*System of Positive Polity*, 1:257.

<sup>73</sup> *Système de Politique Positive*, vol. 2, Comte, Oeuvres 8:161/*Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*, ed. Gertrud Lenzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 408. See also the remark that “this grand transformation is due to the fact that each worker ceases to direct his chief activity to the satisfaction of his personal wants, and finds for it some social or at least some domestic object. In fact he creates wealth only in order to transmit it to others”; *Système de Politique Positive*, vol. 2, Comte, Oeuvres 8:157/*Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 406. This sounds very much like Marx’s discussion of communist workers producing for others in “Comments on James Mill” – although in Marx’s text there is also an emphasis on individual self-realization that is missing in Comte’s. See Marx, MEW E, i, 462–3/Marx, CW 3:227–8.

<sup>74</sup> See *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:220.

<sup>75</sup> Adam Smith also sees our ties to distant unknown others as real but modest, merely a “general fellow-feeling which we have with every man merely because he is our fellow-creature”; Smith,



This contrast is worth stressing. For Comte, *the* route to happiness is via living for others. For Mill, matters are more complicated, but ideally there would be “that entireness of sympathy with all others, which would make any real discordance in the general direction of their conduct in life impossible.”<sup>76</sup> Hume thinks such extensive benevolence is not in the cards for human psychology.

There is also a basic difference in the psychic mechanisms of individual benevolence and universal altruism. Early in chapter 1 of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (first edition, 1759), Adam Smith writes, “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.”<sup>77</sup> He then details with enormous subtlety the various ways one imaginatively puts oneself in another’s place. Comte, however, stresses not putting oneself in any particular other’s place but rather, as Sidgwick notes, “devotion to humanity as a whole,” or as Mill says: “he refers the obligations of duty, as well as all sentiments of devotion, to a concrete object, at once ideal and real; the Human Race, conceived as a continuous whole, including the past, the present, and the future.”<sup>78</sup> (Compare Hume: “In general, it may be affirm’d, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such.”)<sup>79</sup> And Mill, himself, talks not of sympathy with particular others (though of course this is not excluded) but of dedication to “a large enough object to satisfy any reasonable demand for grandeur of aspiration.”<sup>80</sup> One’s emotional and motivating tie is to a noble but highly general object.

As a final point, we can note the two centuries’ different challenges to other-benefiting activity. Hume (following Butler) is concerned to show that kindness

*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 90. And here is Kant from *The Metaphysics of Morals*: “Now the benevolence present in love for all human beings is indeed the greatest in its *extent*, but the smallest in its *degree*; and when I say that I take an interest in this human being’s well-being only out of my love for all human beings, the interest I take is as slight as an interest can be. I am only not indifferent with regard to him.” Immanuel Kant, *Kants Werke: Akademie Textausgabe* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), 6:451/*The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 200 (emphasis in original). In the *Encyclopedia*, Diderot invokes the “general will” (see the article “Droit naturel”) understood as the will of all humankind (in *On the Social Contract*, Rousseau ultimately rejects such a transnational conception of the general will). However, Diderot is claiming that the general will can be found in each of us via an expression of our understanding that is audible when our passions are silent. This is clearly different from Mill’s and Comte’s concern for an extensive expansion of our capacity for sympathy.

<sup>76</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:233.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> See Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of a History of Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 268, and *Auguste Comte*, Mill, CW 10:333. “The real point in issue,” Fredric Harrison writes in a discussion of Comte, “is whether . . . humanity as a whole – past, present, and to come – can inspire a living devotion, capable of permanently concentrating the highest forces of the soul.” See Fredric Harrison, “The Positivist Problem,” *Fortnightly Review* 35 (1869): 485–6.

<sup>79</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, bk. 3, pt. 2, sec. 1, 481.

<sup>80</sup> “Utility of Religion,” Mill, CW 10:420.

to particular others is in fact kindness, not an indirect form of self-love. His examples are constructed to forestall any plausible ulterior motive for the agent's apparently good deed.<sup>81</sup> In the nineteenth century, however, kindness to particular others is contrasted less with self-interest than with impersonal other-benefiting activity. The typical move is to claim that a concern for far-off others masks callousness to those close by. "Thy love afar is spite at home,"<sup>82</sup> says Emerson, and the Bulwer Lytton character who "glowed with philanthropy" for strangers admits that he "felt aversion for the few whom I knew."<sup>83</sup> Hume's claim is that a common sense understanding of human psychology favors accepting benevolence as real. One needs highly "abstruse reflections" to deny it.<sup>84</sup> But against concern for those far away, it is common sense psychology that mounts the challenge. It opens a contrast not between benevolence and self-love but between two forms of apparent benevolence, the personal and the impersonal.<sup>85</sup> Precisely the large ambition here of the nineteenth century – to help even far-off others, to identify with the species as a whole – is what opens it to criticism.

### III

The preceding rejection is *ad hominem*, expressing a debunking sense that a given ideal is a mask for less worthy motives. This was a pervasive form of challenge to each of the two ideals, for after all, in themselves the ideals seem unexceptionable. To sympathize with others, even with the abstraction "humanity," seems unproblematic and to some can be inspiring, and as Mill notes, nobody thinks we should all be identical.<sup>86</sup> To be sure, there is the occasional direct rejection of Mill's individualism. "Having regard to the existing state of society," a reviewer writes in 1873, Mill's doctrine of liberty is "licentious and wicked."<sup>87</sup> And Thomas Arnold, a Catholic reviewer of *On Liberty* (and Matthew Arnold's younger brother), asserts the following key requirement of "Christian

<sup>81</sup> See Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, app. 2, "Of Self-Love."

<sup>82</sup> Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Collected Works*, 2:30.

<sup>83</sup> Lytton, *Falkland*, 16. Lytton's narrator also remarks, "It is in contemplating man at a distance that we become benevolent." See *Falkland*, 16.

<sup>84</sup> See Hume, *Enquiry*, 91.

<sup>85</sup> Impersonal benevolence might foster more than neglect of personal benevolence. Henry Sidgwick notes that the two forms might be in basic conflict. One's kindness to one's intimates might be at odds with one's larger obligations. There could be a conflict between "Rational Benevolence" and "that indulgence of kind affections which Shaftesbury and his followers so persuasively exhibit as its own reward." See Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 503.

<sup>86</sup> See *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:262.

<sup>87</sup> See Herbert Cowell, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Mr John Stuart Mill," *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* 114, September 1873, 352, reprinted in *Liberty: Contemporary Responses to John Stuart Mill*, ed. Andrew Pyle (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 306.

ethics": "Humility, consisting partly in a child-like reception of the revelation of God, partly in the imitation of the lowly and suffering life of Jesus."<sup>88</sup> This is clearly a variant of the "Christian self-denial" that for Mill is directly at odds with the "pagan self-assertion" he recommends as at least a part of a good human life.<sup>89</sup> Still, the dominant criticisms partake of the hermeneutics of suspicion.

With the ideal of individual development, this might seem obvious enough: such an ideal could easily seem selfish. Thoreau and Emerson see themselves charged with this failing ("But all this [Thoreau's way of life] is very selfish, I have heard some of my townsmen say").<sup>90</sup> And here is Wilde: "A man is called selfish if he lives in a manner that seems to him most suitable for the full realization of his own personality; if, in fact, the primary aim of his life is self-development."<sup>91</sup> Self-development is one's own, not others' development. It is a focus on oneself. In a world of widespread misery, that could seem selfish.

Two issues are at play here. On the one hand, it is the philanthropists who demand that Emerson and Thoreau pay attention to the indigent. As we have seen, this is a new demand, making "selfish" what might once have seemed to be merely minding one's own (and one's friends' and family's) business. On the other hand, the ideal of individual development, of the value of such a thing for its own sake and for everybody, is also new. De Tocqueville remarks that "'individualism' is a word coined to express a new idea. Our fathers only knew about egoism."<sup>92</sup> And here he is not mocking individualism but merely indicating that it occupies new territory, morally speaking. That it is *worthy* territory is Emerson's and Thoreau's claim. Here is Thoreau: "I would not subtract anything from the praise that is due to philanthropy, but merely demand justice for all who by their lives and works are a blessing to mankind."<sup>93</sup>

What might count as a blessing is various. It might be straightforward – one might create something new, an invention or perhaps a new form of art, that will benefit others. This is fairly concrete. Yet one might also bestow a less tangible blessing simply through one's way of living, via the kind of person one becomes: one might show a human possibility. "There is always need of persons," Mill says, "not only to discover new truths, and point out when what were once truths are true no longer, but also to commence new practices, and set the example

<sup>88</sup> See Thomas Arnold, "Mill on Liberty," *Rambler* 59, no. 352 (May 1859), reprinted in *Liberty*, 178–9.

<sup>89</sup> See *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:266.

<sup>90</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, 62. See also the demand that Emerson take care of the poor; Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Collected Works*, 2:30ff.

<sup>91</sup> Wilde, "Soul of Man under Socialism," 156.

<sup>92</sup> De Tocqueville, *Démocratie*, 2:97; *Democracy*, vol. 2, pt. 2, chap. 2, 506.

<sup>93</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, 65.

of more enlightened conduct, and better taste and sense in human life.”<sup>94</sup> And Emerson declares that “truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul.”<sup>95</sup> Recognizing a possibility can be the first step toward fundamental change. Thus though inevitably of the self, self-development need not be selfish.<sup>96</sup>

Emerson and Thoreau also go on the attack. Both stress the existence of the undeserving poor and the counterproductiveness of much philanthropy (a Wilde theme as well).<sup>97</sup> And as we have seen, Emerson charges philanthropists with loving the general not the particular. Thoreau adds that the bestowing of alms, even on a large scale, does not inevitably – does not even tend to – make for much in the way of “the flower and fruit of a man.”<sup>98</sup> The canonical target in this vein is that practitioner of “Telescopic Philanthropy,” Mrs. Jellyby in Dickens’s *Bleak House*, “a lady of very remarkable strength of character who devotes herself entirely to the public.” Constantly in correspondence with others who are “anxious for the welfare of their species,” Mrs. Jellyby resolutely ignores the fact that her own children are ill fed, ill clothed and ill housed, not to mention thoroughly filthy, for she can “see nothing nearer than Africa.”<sup>99</sup>

Dickens’s challenge is to the philanthropist’s moral integrity – the philanthropist claims to but in fact does not care for others. Fitzjames Stephen rejects Dickens (“It is indeed a false and vulgar cry which affirms that those who concern themselves most strongly for charity abroad care least for charity at home – that you may know the children of a lady who interests herself about schools and reformatories by their ignorance and naughtiness”),<sup>100</sup> but he challenges the philanthropist’s integrity on a different count. For Stephen, humanity is simply not the sort of thing a person can love. “The human race is so big, so various, so little known, that no one can really love it. You can at most fancy that you love some imaginary representation of bits of it which when examined are only your own fancies personified.”<sup>101</sup> More specifically, living for others tempts one

<sup>94</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:267.

<sup>95</sup> Emerson, “The Divinity School Address” (1838), in *Collected Works*, 1:80.

<sup>96</sup> James Conant stresses this theme in Thoreau, Emerson, and Nietzsche. See especially his “Nietzsche’s Perfectionism: A Reading of ‘Schopenhauer as Educator,’” in *Nietzsche’s Postmoralism*, ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 181–257.

<sup>97</sup> See Thoreau, *Walden*, 64, and Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” *Collected Works*, 2:31. And see Wilde, “Soul of Man under Socialism,” 127–8.

<sup>98</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, 65.

<sup>99</sup> See Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), chap. 4.

<sup>100</sup> James Fitzjames Stephen, “Philanthropy,” in *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Three Brief Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 293. Like Thoreau, Stephen presses that devotees of the religion of humanity tend not to be exemplary human beings; see Stephen, “Philanthropy,” 292–3.

<sup>101</sup> Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, 241.

to work for others' happiness by imposing on them a particular picture of that happiness. "Love for Humanity," Stephen writes, means "a fanatical attachment to some favourite theory" of happiness. A person "to whom this ideal becomes so far a reality as to colour his thoughts, his feelings, his estimate of the present and his action towards it [phrases clearly referring to *Utilitarianism*, chapter 3], is usually ... perfectly ready to sacrifice that which living people do actually regard as constituting their happiness to his own notions of what will constitute the happiness of other generations."<sup>102</sup> Here what is missing is a concern for actual people as they are rather than as the philanthropist thinks they should be – the philanthropist's real goal is to be a tyrant.

Such ad hominem suspicion of do-gooders is by now common coin (indeed, common cant), but it is worth stressing the sheer oppressiveness many writers felt from the obligation to be philanthropic, the sense that it stifled expression of the inner self (Mill: "the spirit of improvement is not always a spirit of liberty")<sup>103</sup> and turned one from the right people to help and the right way of helping them.<sup>104</sup> "Do not tell me, as a good man did to-day," Emerson writes in "Self-Reliance," "of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they *my* poor? I tell thee thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong."<sup>105</sup> Emerson does not reject all concern for others. "There is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual affinity I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison, if need be."<sup>106</sup> But those persons are *his*, tied to him by a particular "spiritual affinity." For them he will do more than give alms. For them he will go to prison – to enable them to live in freedom or perhaps to show them how to live even in unfreedom. But then benevolence becomes something beyond earnest charity or pious uplift. It becomes a more literal saving of or a more fundamental challenge – Emerson's "provocation" – to the other person.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, it is personal, help to those who are mine, in effect, a harking back to the eighteenth century.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, 238.

<sup>103</sup> *On Liberty*, Mill, CW 18:272.

<sup>104</sup> Thoreau: "The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?" See *Walden*, 20.

<sup>105</sup> Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Collected Works*, 2:30–1.

<sup>106</sup> Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Collected Works*, 2:31.

<sup>107</sup> See also Thoreau's remark that "philanthropy is not love for one's fellow-man in the broadest sense," where his thought is that philanthropy is worthless if it does not draw out the best in the individual, "if their philanthropy do not help *us* in our best estate, when we are most worthy to be helped"; *Walden*, 63.

<sup>108</sup> Beyond the issues discussed in the text, there were other objections to the religion of humanity. For instance, Carlyle opposes universal philanthropy's cult of fellow feeling on behalf of the obligation simply to do one's duty. See Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind*, 275–6.

## IV

Let us assume that both ideals in fact serve worthy forms of human life. This prompts another question. Can we opt for both? Simply fit them together?

There is a moment in *Utilitarianism* where Mill worries about possible conflict. After sketching the strong identification ideal, he warns of its danger, namely, “that it should be so excessive as to interfere unduly with human freedom and individuality.”<sup>109</sup> Mill’s worry here is Comte, who favors maximal (noncoercive) social pressure to foster strong identification without regard for the possibility that this would leave no space for individual self-development via non-other-benefiting pursuits; indeed, Comte would welcome this.<sup>110</sup> Mill, however, not only favors self-development but seems to think there is a point to which strong identification can go without interfering “unduly with human freedom and individuality.” In principle, he seems to think, we could avoid excess and realize both ideals. But that is the question. If it is strong enough to mitigate the fear of death, can strong identification really leave sufficient space for individual self-development? And if it leaves sufficient space, can it really be strong enough to mitigate the fear of death?

Now presumably, the two ideals do not *necessarily* conflict. Suppose one’s autonomously chosen self-development activities are also other-benefiting activities, such as being a teacher or doctor or medical researcher (or some combination). And suppose such activities foster strong identification with humanity.<sup>111</sup> There is then no conflict.

The issue of whether the ideals *can* conflict is more interesting, for suppose now that the *only* way I can develop myself is by working for others. Suppose there is an internal constraint on self-development such that it *must* go along with

<sup>109</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:232.

<sup>110</sup> See *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, Mill, CW 10:327. Mill has in mind such statements as these from the *System of Positive Polity*: “In the positive state, where no supernatural claims are admissible, the idea of *right* will entirely disappear. Every one has duties, duties towards all; but rights in the ordinary sense can be claimed by none.” See *Système de Politique Positive*, vol. 1, Comte, Oeuvres 7:361/*System of Positive Polity* 1:290 (emphasis in original). And here is a statement of the need to keep moral watch on all citizens. “It is there that the fundamental maxim: Live for others [*vivre pour autrui*] receives its practical complement: live openly [*vivre au grand jour*], without which it would soon become insufficient, and often even illusory. Despite the self-interested precautions of metaphysical legislators, the western instinct should regard a normal publicity for private acts as the necessary guarantee for true citizenship. . . . All who would refuse to live openly [*au grand jour*] would justly be suspected of not really wanting to live for others.” See *Système de Politique Positive*, vol. 4, Comte, Oeuvres, 10:312. I owe the citation and translation to Wernick, *August Comte*, 163.

<sup>111</sup> I list these activities because they seem clearly to lend themselves to strong identification. I leave open the range of other activities that might do so as well.

benefiting others. There would then be a preestablished harmony between the ideals. Here is Matthew Arnold:

[Because] men are all members of one great whole, and the sympathy which is in human nature will not allow one member to be indifferent to the rest or to have a perfect welfare independent of the rest, the expansion of our humanity, to suit the idea of perfection which culture forms, must be a *general* expansion. Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated. The individual is required, under pain of being stunted and enfeebled in his own development if he disobeys, to carry others along with him in his march towards perfection.<sup>112</sup>

The metric here for others' benefit is unclear, described both as "perfect welfare" and "perfection." More important is the ambiguity between a psychological and a conceptual claim. The first sentence seems to say that I naturally so identify with others that I *will not* develop my own perfection unless I can carry others along. Perhaps I will choose not to do so; perhaps doing so would somehow unstring me. Either way, as a fact of human psychology – so goes this claim – my own perfection requires others' perfection. But the second sentence makes a different kind of claim, a claim about perfection "as culture conceives it." It says that, as a conceptual matter, the content of human perfection is in some essential way tied to living with other (more or less) perfected people.

Arnold wants to show the impossibility of selfish self-development. But are his claims plausible? Detailed assessment of the conceptual claim would take us too far afield. Still, it *could* be the case that perfection involves deep ties to others and that such ties are possible only under conditions where all can pursue their own perfection (with reasonable hope for reasonable success). That is the 1844 Marx's view. A key component of realizing one's nature, Marx says, is to relate to others as tied to them via joint membership in the human species, but that way of relating to others is only possible under communism, that is, under conditions where all can pursue perfection.

As for Arnold's psychological claim, it seems dubious. Great individuals have flourished in societies based on slavery, and many have seemed to possess little of that "sympathy which is in human nature." Indeed, the claim that sympathy with the downtrodden is pervasive seems belied by the contemporary English middle class – as Friedrich Engels notes: "I once went into Manchester with ... a bourgeois, and spoke to him of the bad, unwholesome method of building, the frightful condition of the working-people's quarters, and asserted that I had never seen so ill-built a city. The man listened quietly to the end, and said at the corner where we parted: 'And yet there is a great deal of money made here; good morning, sir.'"<sup>113</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Works 6:12.

<sup>113</sup> Engels, *Condition of the Working-Class in England*, Marx, MEW 2:487/Marx, CW 4:563.

There is a further issue. Suppose we grant that complete perfection of one requires at least substantial perfection of all. Clearly, then, complete perfection is impossible prior to dramatic social change. But that means that at present there *is* a conflict between the two ideals: were the downtrodden less so, I could pay more attention to self-development and so better realize my own perfection. My concern to take them to their perfection undermines my realization of mine (unless I am in one of the helping trades). Moreover, if the lot of the downtrodden is sufficiently horrible, my concern for them might be so great as to leave neither time nor psychic space for my own perfection. Then the conflict is profound, for suppose the current condition of most human beings is bad. Then that sympathy to which Arnold thinks we all will yield would hamper, and perhaps thoroughly hamstring, those who *are* capable of (significant even if not complete) perfection. That is Nietzsche's worry. "The sick represent the greatest danger for the healthy.... What is to be feared ... [is] not great fear but great *pity*."<sup>114</sup>

Wilde is admirably clear about the problem. "The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others [Comte's *vivre pour autrui*] which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody. In fact, scarcely any one at all escapes."<sup>115</sup> Wilde agrees with Arnold that there is a natural tendency to sympathize with misery: "The majority of people ... find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this."<sup>116</sup> But this means that they will give themselves over to "remedying the evils that they see" and thus fail to "realize the perfection of what was in [them]."<sup>117</sup>

Nietzsche recommends that "the healthy" not surrender to pity. Wilde thinks this strategy useless: we have too much sympathy for it to work. On the other hand, Wilde thinks that with the advent of socialism "sympathy with suffering"<sup>118</sup> will no longer be triggered: "With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true beautiful, healthy Individualism."<sup>119</sup> Moreover, socialism will generate a positive form of living for others. Sympathy will sustain, not sap individualism: "the sympathy of man will be large, healthy, and spontaneous. Man will

<sup>114</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann, 1992), Essay III, §14/*On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), Essay III, §14, 121–2.

<sup>115</sup> Wilde, "Soul of Man under Socialism," 127.

<sup>116</sup> Wilde, "Soul of Man Under Socialism," 127.

<sup>117</sup> Wilde, "Soul of Man under Socialism," 127. Wilde neglects the possibility that for some agents other-benefiting activity might be their route to perfection.

<sup>118</sup> Wilde, "Soul of Man under Socialism," 127.

<sup>119</sup> Wilde, "Soul of Man Under Socialism," 133.



have joy in the contemplation of the joyous lives of others”<sup>120</sup> – as with the 1844 Marx’s “appropriation” of one another’s enjoyments.

Wilde’s fear that self-development is threatened by devotion to ameliorating the vast contemporary suffering is the other side of the nineteenth-century expansion of sympathy. When the misery of the world is massive and palpable – at least to the thoughtful and sympathetic agent – eighteenth-century homilies about the pleasures of benevolence seem hollow. In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot deals with the potentially expanded obligations of the country squire in the period just before the Reform Act of 1832. Early in the novel, Dorothea Brooke induces Sir James Chettam to engage in large-scale cottage building to improve his tenants’ living conditions, a kind of rural renewal program. (“Oh, I hope I should be able to get the people well housed in Lowick!” Dorothea says, “I will draw plenty of plans while I have time.”<sup>121</sup> Here we have the nineteenth-century reformer: it is “the people” in Lowick, not this or that person who must be well housed, and of course we need to draw up plans.) Dorothea clearly derives satisfaction from the contemplation of improved lives, but such charity is psychologically comparatively costless. Immersion in the London or Manchester slums demands a psychic commitment of another order. One is likely to be flooded with misery, to see its remedy as the futile and soul-deadening task of a lifetime. (*Here*, even devotion to the helping professions might be insufficient to realize both ideals.) That is what so worries Wilde.<sup>122</sup>

Wilde’s worry has a parallel in the great utilitarian Henry Sidgwick’s “Dualism of the Practical Reason.”<sup>123</sup> Sidgwick finds it rational to follow the dictates of self-love *and* rational to comply with the requirements of the general happiness. And he notes that these might conflict. What Sidgwick calls “Rational Self-love” is not identical to the self-development ideal, but, like that ideal, it is an aim that involves focus on the self and, like that aim, it might – at least in the present – conflict with the requirements for benefiting others. Sidgwick points out that to promote the general happiness an agent might have to sacrifice everything that goes into making his own life worth living. “A man may find that he can best promote the general happiness by working in comparative solitude for ends that he never hopes to see realised, or by working chiefly among and for persons for whom he cannot feel much affection, or by doing what must alienate or grieve those whom he loves best, or must make it necessary for him to dispense with the most intimate of human ties.”<sup>124</sup> Like Wilde, Sidgwick recognizes that – at

<sup>120</sup> Wilde, “Soul of Man under Socialism,” 157.

<sup>121</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), bk. 1, chap. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, it apparently does not worry the inspector of schools, Matthew Arnold.

<sup>123</sup> The phrase is used at Sidgwick, *Methods*, 404 note. For Sidgwick’s final discussion, see *Methods*, 507–9.

<sup>124</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods*, 503.

least in the present – living for others might undermine a good life for oneself. He mournfully concedes that he cannot demonstrate that there is an “inseparable connexion between Utilitarian Duty and the greatest happiness of the individual who conforms to it.”<sup>125</sup>

Now properly to determine how far and under what conditions the two ideals can be combined would require discussion of the range of lives that plausibly instantiate the strong-identification ideal, a range that will be increasingly broad the more expansively one understands what it is to bestow a benefit on others (e.g., via Emersonian provocation?). There is not space here for such discussion. Still, let us concede to Wilde that at his time – actually, at any time right up to the present – existing large-scale misery means that there is at least an issue about sewing both ideals into a single life.

Imagine, however, that we have reached true communism or a thoroughly enlightened utilitarianism. Could one *then* combine both ideals in a single life? And how would such a life look? In 1890, Ernest Renan claims that the ideal agent can be several things at once. “The perfect man will be he who is at the same time poet, philosopher, scientist, virtuous man, and that not by intervals or at distinct moments of his life; ... he is indeed simultaneously poet and philosopher, philosopher and scientist, one in whom, in a word, all the elements of humanity are joined in a higher harmony, as in humanity itself.”<sup>126</sup>

This picture has two variants. On Renan’s own, all one’s identities are constantly operative. One is constantly everything one is. Call this *the always-be-everything model*. On a different variant, only one’s species identity is constantly operative. In the famous description of communism from *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels assert that it will be “possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, cowherd or critic.”<sup>127</sup> I never become hunter, fisherman, and so on, in the sense of having that identity pervade my life. Nevertheless, I might presumably always instantiate the identity “human being” and do so in the strong sense on which Mill and Feuerbach insist. That is precisely how Feuerbach sees things in 1843. “The human philosopher ... says: *even in thinking and in being a philosopher, I am a human being among human beings*.”<sup>128</sup> I assume that this could

<sup>125</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods*, 503.

<sup>126</sup> Ernest Renan, “L’Avenir de la science,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. H. Psichari, vol. 3 (Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1949), 736. Quoted in John Passmore, *The Perfectionability of Man* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1970), 250. Though not published until 1890, Renan’s essay was written much earlier, in 1848–9.

<sup>127</sup> Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, Marx, MEW 3:33/Marx, CW 5:47.

<sup>128</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (1843), Feuerbach, GW 9:339; *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 72, translation amended.

be the case not only with being a philosopher but with being a hunter, and so forth. While engaging in any activity one would always be a human being among human beings. One's human identity would permeate one's life. Call this *the permeation model*.

The always-be-everything model seems implausible. It is hard to give content to the thought that while hunting I can also be, in any meaningful sense, a philosopher. I am hunting, not philosophizing. And if I somehow remain a philosopher, my philosopher's way of reacting to the world (e.g., with wonder) is likely to hinder my hunting. At my most efficient, I should probably divest myself of identity A in order to maximize efficiency at the activities of identity B. It is better not always to be everything.

The permeation model might be more plausible. In being a hunter or a fisherman one does not stop being a human being, and perhaps one's sense of oneself under that identity could accompany all one's other identities. This seems the right picture if we take seriously the idea of a religion of humanity. The devout Christian does not stop being a Christian when he hunts or fishes. I take this to be the 1844 Marx's view of what communists will be like. They will go about their different activities but always with the sense of themselves as tied deeply to others through their mutual membership in the human species.

We need to look more closely, then, at this model and its plausibility. Before doing so, however, it is important to distinguish our issue from two others. First, ours is not the issue of whether the self-development ideal is consistent with conformity to the utilitarian standard of conduct. Mill insists that the latter is (largely) satisfied by compliance with secondary (comparatively specific) rules. Such rules obviate the need for moment by moment utilitarian calculation and also make it unnecessary to aim directly at utility promotion: one simply follows the rules.<sup>129</sup> And doing so is (normally) compatible with the self-development ideal. Mere rule compliance, though, is unlikely to be enough to realize the ideal of strong identification. That involves a commitment that "color[s] all thought, feeling, and action" and that provides a link to others sufficient to substitute for personal immortality. Such a commitment requires significant focus on others and their well-being: in effect, the strong identification ideal of the person is more demanding than the utilitarian standard of conduct. *Now*, the question

<sup>129</sup> See "Utilitarianism," Mill, CW 10:224–5; see also, "Bentham," Mill, CW 10:111, and "Dr. Whewell on Moral Philosophy," Mill, CW 10:173. For the view that, for Mill, right actions are those that fall under secondary rules and that the justification of these rules is their tendency to promote utility, see (among others) J. O. Urmson, "The Interpretation of the Moral Philosophy of J. S. Mill," *Philosophical Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1953): 33–9; D. G. Brown, "Mill's Act-Utilitarianism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1974): 67–8; and Fred Berger, *Happiness, Justice, and Freedom: The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), chap. 3.

does arise as to whether enough psychic space remains also to realize the self-development ideal. That is our question.

Second, the issue of combining the two ideals differs from another nineteenth- (and eighteenth-) century worry: how to heal the split between man and citizen. One is a man, according to that worry, and one is a citizen. How can these identities be combined into a harmonious whole? The problem is ancient but the modern world and in particular the capitalist world is thought to make it especially acute. As a private agent in civil society one acts in one's own interest; as a citizen one acts for the public good. Surely these will sometimes conflict.

This is a real question but it is only partly ours. It presumes a structurally fostered motivational tension while we are now asking about ideal conditions. The usual man/citizen conflict is in terms of material interests – spending time and money on the public good takes time and money from one's individual good. For Marx, however, there is no such problem: in true communism there is material abundance; moreover, the state hardly exists (it is reduced to the administration of things) and so hardly takes one's time. To be sure, for Mill there might be conflict. Even an enlightened utilitarian society will not eliminate scarcity, and so one might be tempted to cheat on utility-promoting (moral or legal) rules. But for Mill that issue would be handled by sanctions (moral or legal) – and in a *truly* enlightened utilitarian society, one's motivations would be such as to forestall temptation. More to the point, our concern is not a conflict between desire and obligation but between two types of aspiration, between two ideals of the person.

Our concern *does* map onto the man/citizen tension if we construe that tension not as about which actions to perform but as about whether one's ultimate good rests in one's aspirations qua individual or qua citizen. Rousseau celebrates the Spartan mother who asks the messenger not about her five soldier sons but about the battle's outcome and, when told all her sons are dead, ignores the news, rejoicing in word of the Spartan victory.<sup>130</sup> Here there is a conflict between a way of life focused on the goods of individual existence and one focused on the goods of national solidarity; the latter obliterates the former. Here the difference between our concern and the man/citizen conflict is one of scope. But it should be stressed that the expansion of social concern from the particular polity's good to the species's good is a considerable expansion. The psychic demands on identifying with humanity are, I suspect, *much* greater than those involved in identifying with a particular state (or city-state). Put differently, Rousseau's Spartan mother suggests a difficulty in realizing oneself – which would include

<sup>130</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966), 39/*Emile: Or, On education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 40.

having a coherent psychology – as both individual and citizen. The difficulty is likely to be all the greater when cast in terms of self-developer and religionist of humanity.

To return to our question, then: the better model for combining identities is the permeation model, but is this a genuine possibility of human nature, even under ideal conditions? (There is, of course, a jack-of-all-trades problem. One cannot develop very many talents if one is to develop any talent well. Pace Renan and Marx, one cannot be a (good) poet *and* philosopher *and* painter, etc.<sup>131</sup> But put that aside.) There seem to be two cases. On case (1), identification with humanity is something with which one grows up, precisely as one grows up with the sense of oneself as a member of a particular family and, if one has a religious education, as a member of a particular religion. One does not have to think about being a member of humanity any more than one thinks about being a brother or sister or member of this or that religion. That one is a human being tied to other human beings is usually merely a background fact for how one sees oneself in the world. On this picture, one could engage in self-development without compromising strong identification. Combining the two ideals presents no problem. By contrast, on case (2), strong identification with humanity is a difficult achievement, one that requires constant or at least frequent practice. Atrophy sets in unless one continues to work at it.

Now clearly, one's self-development skills must be worked at. Qua self-developer, one consciously forms oneself. And such deliberate forming of the self requires a stance in life that is angled toward the self. On case (2), identification with humanity must be worked at, as well. And assuming that it requires a different form of focus (that is, assuming that one's self-development activities are *not* helping activities, leaving open how broadly that notion is defined), namely, a focus on others, including distant, unknown others (or perhaps on the abstraction, "humanity"), it is hard to see how a single life can adequately realize both self-development and strong identification. Adequately to realize either ideal seems to preclude the kind of constant – or at least frequent – focus required adequately to realize the other. On case (2), the strong identification Mill desires will not arise automatically, even under ideal conditions. Broad bonds of human affection will have to be worked at.<sup>132</sup> But as Wilde's self-culture will also have to be worked at, the two ideals seem uncombinable. The

<sup>131</sup> See Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 89–91.

<sup>132</sup> In a democratic age, Tocqueville remarks, "the bonds of human affection are wider" than in an aristocratic age, but they are "more relaxed" (see *Démocratie*, 2:98; *Democracy*, vol. 2, pt. 2, chap. 2, 507). If de Tocqueville is right, then the strong – the unrelaxed – identification Mill desires will not arise automatically, even under ideal democratic conditions. Even then, they will have to be worked at.

conflict is not of values but of psychic space. The human psyche simply seems insufficiently capacious.

Our question reduces, then, to whether to understand strong identification with humanity under ideal conditions along the lines of case (1) or case (2). Of course, one could obviate the issue by denying the possibility of strong identification; for example, Fitzjames Stephen would say that one just cannot love humanity. Marx and Wilde would reply that we ought not to judge by what is feasible at present. So would Mill: we are, he claims, in a “comparatively early state of human advancement”; in a later state it will be quite possible to “feel that entireness of sympathy with all others.”<sup>133</sup>

I admit to skepticism. However, the topic is not at present a live one, and that should make for hesitation in judging – perhaps I am just taking current common sense as the last word.<sup>134</sup>

As for choosing between cases (1) and (2), there is a consideration that suggests it is unlikely case (1) could ever obtain. It goes to the parallel to Christian belief. For the believer, Christian belief is part of the background of his life but it is not *mere* background. Indeed, according to some Christian writers it involves constant focus and concern. One of Søren Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, Johannes Climacus, notes what this might be like in terms of one’s awareness of one’s own mortality.

The uncertainty of death comes more and more to interpenetrate my subjectivity dialectically. It thus becomes more and more important for me to think it in connection with every factor and phase of my life; for since the uncertainty is there in every moment, it can be overcome only by overcoming it in every moment.<sup>135</sup>

This Climacian overcoming of the awareness of death is an overcoming of the awareness of one’s own, one’s individual, death, something the religion of humanity does not provide. Yet Mill does assert that the adherent of the religion of humanity would “up to the hour of death live ideally in the life of those who are to follow them.”<sup>136</sup> So presumably one would have – up to the

<sup>133</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Mill, CW 10:233.

<sup>134</sup> Annette Baier is a recent analytical philosopher who expresses an aspiration that seems in line with – though still more modest than – the nineteenth-century religion of humanity: “I shall suggest that the secular equivalent of faith in God, which we need in morality as well as in science or knowledge acquisition, is faith in the human community and its evolving procedures – in the prospects for many handed cognitive ambitions and moral hopes.” See Annette Baier, “Secular Faith,” in Annette Baier, *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 293.

<sup>135</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 149. Climacus presents this as one possible way to relate to the fact of one’s mortality.

<sup>136</sup> “Utility of Religion,” Mill, CW 10:426.

hour of death – a moment by moment fully adequate substitute for personal immortality.

Such a moment by moment overcoming of death is much more in line with case (2) than with case (1). That is, when taken seriously, the parallel to religion and especially to Christianity favors (2). A religion of humanity is more than mere background.

But then we have to face the issue about (2). Can such a moment by moment overcoming of death be squared with an adequate focus on the elements of one's self-development? Suppose (a) strong identification is adequately attained only if it can provide a psychologically satisfying substitute for personal immortality; (b) on a Climacian understanding of the parallel to religion, attaining the requisite sense of overcoming mortality requires "overcoming it in every moment"; and (c) self-development (for many people, anyway) requires frequent significant focus on this or that non-mortality-overcoming activity (i.e., *non-strong-identification* activity). Then (d) on a Climacian understanding of the parallel to religion, self-development and strong identification cannot (for many people) be jointly realized.

Two replies are possible: one might reject such an understanding of the parallel to religion, or one might try to show that the parallel is consistent with agents' having more than a single moment by moment focus.<sup>137</sup> Unfortunately, the devotees of the religion of humanity do not discuss such issues about the philosophy of their religion.<sup>138</sup> The underlying point is that adequate assessment of the possibility of combining strong identification and self-development requires an account of just what is involved in the idea of a *religion* of humanity. I do not mean what the future might involve by way of outward religious trappings – ritual, canonization, and so on (Comte provides one such detailed and ludicrous variant).<sup>139</sup> At issue is the inward experience of the adherent. Feuerbach says that "to think, speak, and act in a pure and true human fashion will, however, be granted only

<sup>137</sup> Another Kierkegaard work, *Fear and Trembling*, provides two images of an individual who has faith, Abraham and a bourgeois. Neither is a hermit. Each goes about the business of life while all the time having faith (that is part of what makes each a "marvel" according to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author). However, whether they do so – or, rather, could do so – with the attitude of a Millian self-developer, with the attitude of an agent concerned to create himself, is unclear. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 6 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>138</sup> In *Auguste Comte*, Mill provides conditions for something to count as a religion, but he says little about the inner life of an adherent of the religion of humanity. See *Auguste Comte*, Mill, CW 10:332–3.

<sup>139</sup> See, for instance, the "System of Sociolatriy or Social Worship, Embracing in a Series of Eighty-one Annual Festivals the Worship of Humanity under All Its Aspects"; *Catéchisme positiviste: ou, Sommaire exposition de la religion universelle* (1852), Comte, Oeuvres, 11:129/*The Catechism of Positive Religion*, trans. Richard Congreve (1858; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1891), table A.

to future generations.”<sup>140</sup> This is also Marx’s, Wilde’s and Mill’s view. However, *we* are a future generation, and yet current life seems further from, not closer to, the condition Feuerbach invokes. The possibility of combining the two ideals should not be dismissed; still, it is hard to accept that possibility in the absence of a palpable and compelling description of what it would be like actually to be a self-developing religionist of humanity, that is, what it would be like actually to develop a wide *and* deep range of one’s individual talents while thinking, speaking, and acting in a pure and true human fashion.

Of course, this hardly entails that we should not try to develop our talents and/or to live in a more pure and true human fashion. And it hardly entails that we should not try to change institutions to make it more possible for more people to develop their talents and/or to live in a more pure and true human fashion. My skepticism is not about the possibility of massive improvement along either or both of the axes favored by the writers I have discussed. These writers’ criticisms of their present and the general cast of their ideals for the future – *much* more possibility for both individual development and social connectedness – seem to me as relevant today as a century and a half ago. My skepticism is merely about the likelihood of a certain human apotheosis: simultaneously to realize oneself as a self-developer *and* as a true religionist of humanity seems a reach that will exceed one’s grasp.

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<sup>140</sup> *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, Feuerbach, GW 9:264; Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, 3.



## SOCIAL DISSATISFACTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

CHRISTINE BLAETTLER

(TRANSLATED BY ALEXA ALFER)

The French Revolution provided the Enlightenment project not only with a political and social, but also with an intellectual goal. The task was to utilize the liberating potential of human reason and thus to leave behind ‘self-incurred immaturity’. It soon became clear, however, that this was not only easier thought than done, but that it also did not apply to all people in equal measure. While the postulate of equality had certainly been framed in general terms, it nevertheless, in practice, excluded women, the working class, and non-Westerners. Similarly, in many cases, reason itself – lacking faith in its powers as well as affective support – turned out to be a rather feeble category. In view of man’s being an affective creature, Kant approved enthusiasm, even though enthusiasm, as an affect, could, from the point of view of moral philosophy, not compete with reason. The mass enthusiasm for the French Revolution nevertheless seemed to lend cogency to the proposition of the moral disposition of mankind. As a ‘historical sign’, enthusiasm indicates the tendency toward a moral humanity. As Kant puts it in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798): “the passionate participation in the good, i.e., enthusiasm (although not to be wholly esteemed, since passion as such deserves censure), provide through this history the occasion for the following remark which is important for anthropology: genuine enthusiasm always moves only toward what is ideal ... , and it cannot be grafted onto self-interest.”<sup>1</sup>

Man’s affectivity, however, is not merely trained on the ideal or the purely ethical, even if it can accommodate concepts of happiness. Neither is it content to play a mere supporting role vis-à-vis reason. Rather, the affects laid claim to anthropological as well as social significance in their own right. Indignation, as a revolutionary affect, gained increasing prominence, while the revolutions, in their turn, shaped the entire period under discussion here. In both theory and

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris, 1979), 155; *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900–) [hereafter Kant, Ak], 7:86.

politics, in the private as well as in the social realm, we can glean the complexity of the modern period as it now enfolded. Allied to the notion of modernity were the rise of a future dimension, a belief in progress, and the idea of the new; the period's starting point is usually defined as the years around 1800. Nevertheless, the modern period turns out to be a far more complex entity and one that cannot be reduced to Enlightenment ideas alone. Rather, it also encompassed a number of countermovements, which can be summarized under the concept of Romanticism. What Hegel had analyzed and described as bourgeois capitalist society soon revealed itself, in the everyday lives of many ordinary people, as a crude, exploitative force. Rationalization, mechanization, and industrialization resulted in new hardships, and social disappointment, disaffection, and resistance found expression within this very framework. Intellectually, an articulation of supposedly suppressed needs and desires were articulated in a variety of forms and from a variety of persuasions in sociocritical analyses and theoretical essays, revolutionary manifestos, and utopian images, all of which maintained a direct and practical relevance. The present chapter will discuss these interlinking developments through the prism of four distinct conceptual pairs, each of which marks a specific focal point for nineteenth-century social movements. This grouping is essentially analytical in nature. In reality, the various complexes addressed in the present chapter all entertain various links and relationships with one another. Nevertheless, the analytical approach allows us to discuss certain dynamics and conflicts in an exemplary fashion and highlight how these are reflected in the philosophical discourses of the time. Accordingly, the focus here will be on equality and liberty, desire and affect, technology and work, and revolution and eternal recurrence, respectively.

## EQUALITY AND LIBERTY

*de Gouges*

"To summarize: *the extension of the privileges of women is the general principle of all progress*,"<sup>2</sup> Charles Fourier wrote in his 1808 *Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales* (Theory of the Four Movements and the General Destinies). At the time, both women and men criticized the position of women within bourgeois gender relations. Women in particular demanded that the unredeemed Enlightenment promise of equality and liberty should also be extended to them. Their dissatisfaction was aggravated by the fact that women were increasingly

<sup>2</sup> Charles Fourier, *Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales* (1808), in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Anthropos, 1966), 1:133.

relegated to the domestic sphere. In 1789, the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen) was drawn up; it served as the basis for the new French constitution, which was adopted by the National Assembly in Paris in 1791. A draft for a bill, written by Olympe de Gouges (1748–93) and entitled *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen), was published a few days later. In the introduction, de Gouges writes with regard to liberty and equality, after all the philosophical and programmatic cornerstones of the French Revolution: “This revolution will only truly be realised once all women are conscious of their deplorable lot and have become fully aware of the loss of their rights within this society.”<sup>3</sup> In de Gouges’s view, a declaration specifically dedicated to the rights of women and female citizens was necessary, since changes in civil, criminal, and public law had effected very little corresponding change as far as the continuing and fundamental discrimination against women was concerned. The improvements that had been achieved related mostly to minor details. Paragraph by paragraph, de Gouges trawled through the legal code, revising it with the aim of achieving women’s social and political equality as well as gender equality in civil and criminal law. To the same end, she also added a draft social contract between men and women to her *Declaration*, which contained provisions for the separation of estates in case of divorce and sought to enshrine the complete equality in law of legitimate and illegitimate children in terms of inheritance and naming rights. De Gouges was not the only activist engaged in this cause, and neither was she the only woman. In 1790, Jean Antoine de Condorcet had demanded the admission of women to the rights of citizenship in his treatise *Sur l’admission des femmes au droit de cité* (On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship). The declaration of human rights conceived of human rights as natural rights, to which every human being was entitled by virtue of being an originally autonomous, free, equal, and rational individual. The constitution, however, framed these human rights as male rights, excluding women from almost all civil rights and from political participation in particular. De Gouges was involved in a number of general causes, among them the abolition of slavery<sup>4</sup> (see her play *L’esclavage des noirs* (Negro Slavery), first performed in 1789); she also championed a direct plebiscite on the form of government in her 1793 pamphlet *Les trois urnes, ou le salut de la patrie, par un voyageur aérien* (The Three Urns, or the Salvation of the Country, by an Aerial Traveler). Because, for some time, she had been suspected of being an enemy of the revolution, this latter piece of writing finally furnished the

<sup>3</sup> Olympe de Gouges, “Les droits de la femme,” in *Écrits Politiques, 1788–1791* (Paris: Côté-femmes, 1993), 205.

<sup>4</sup> For a philosophical analysis of the interrelation of slavery and bourgeois society, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

Jacobins, during the Reign of Terror, with a reason to arrest her. Charged with penning “counterrevolutionary” literature, de Gouges was sentenced to death by guillotine and executed in November 1793.

### *Wollstonecraft*

During this period, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) also resided in Paris. We do not know whether the two women ever met. Like de Gouges, Wollstonecraft held on to the ideals of the French Revolution, even though she felt that, in France, these ideals had been betrayed, not least as far as the constitutional guarantee of human rights and, in particular, their extension to women was concerned. In 1790, in response to Edmund Burke’s antirevolutionary *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and a good while before the publication of Thomas Paine’s influential *The Rights of Man* (1791/2), Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, thus intervening directly in the social and political controversy that raged between proponents and detractors of the French Revolution in England. Siding with the revolution and the cause of the oppressed, Wollstonecraft here already draws a parallel with men’s oppression of women. The issue is raised again and in even more explicit terms in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, which she published in 1792. Here, Wollstonecraft demanded that the theoretical commitment to equality and liberty must also be realized in social and political practice – a demand echoed fifty years later by Harriet Taylor-Mill<sup>5</sup> in collaboration with John Stuart Mill. According to Wollstonecraft, the current order deprived women of their unalienable human rights; women were still dominated and controlled by men, as a consequence of which both women as individuals and society at large had to suffer. Arguing against a Rousseau-inspired natural ideal of humankind and of gender relations in particular, Wollstonecraft appealed to the individual’s responsibility to develop him- and herself through rational actions and thus to improve society. Her second *Vindication* addressed itself to both men and women and called on both genders to fight together for a woman’s right to freedom and equality in the domestic sphere, in public life, and throughout the world of work. She also criticized institutions and current social practices that she saw as being in need of reform. To Wollstonecraft, the emancipation of women could only be achieved by means of complete social and political gender equality:

Let woman share the rights and she will emulate the virtues of man, for she must grow more perfect when emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *The Complete Works of Harriet Taylor Mill*, ed. Jo Ellen Jacobs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); see, in particular, “The Enfranchisement of Women” (1851), 51–73.

to her duty. – If the latter, it will be expedient to open a fresh trade with Russia for whips; a present which a father should always make to his son-in-law on his wedding day, that a husband may keep his whole family in order by the same means; and without any violation of justice reign, wielding this sceptre, sole master of his house, because he is the only being in it who has reason: – the divine, indefeasible earthly sovereignty breathed into man by the Master of the universe.<sup>6</sup>

It is precisely this irony that is echoed in Nietzsche when he has the “little old woman” in *Zarathustra* exclaim: “You go to women? Do not forget the whip!”<sup>7</sup>

Wollstonecraft here touches upon a development that was just beginning to emerge at the end of the eighteenth century, that is, at the outset of the modern period. Subsequent decades saw far-reaching social differentiations, among them the separation of work and home, that is, the dissociation of the economic from the domestic sphere. This separation, in its turn, resulted in profound changes in gender relations, with production now being the exclusive domain of men, while women were relegated to the reproductive realm. Notably, this split not only ran along the dividing line between the public and the private, but also along the one separating society from nature.<sup>8</sup> This allowed further dualisms to emerge, such as the objective-subjective or the rational-emotional dualism. Nature, the private sphere, the subjective, and the emotional thus came to be associated with women. Gender relations were not founded on the principle of autonomy and equality but rather conceived of as a complementary opposition manifesting itself in relationships of super- and subordination. Even though this clashed with the notion of romantic love, this notion’s very emphasis on love ultimately sat comfortably with the asymmetry in gender relations as it, too, accorded only men the status of a bourgeois individual.<sup>9</sup> Women – just as men, when they were at home – were part of the human species, but they were denied both the status of a political subject (citizen, *citoyen*) and the status of social and economic entrepreneur (bourgeois). Middle-class women thus found themselves confined to the domestic sphere. This separation had consequences on both sides of the divide, which also carried forward into the home. For the man, the home represented a place of rest and refuge; for the woman, however, it described, above all, her place of work. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to think of modernity as split down the

<sup>6</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (New York: New York University Press 1989), 5:266.

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. Adrian del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 50.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Cornelia Klinger, “1800 – Eine Epochenchwelle im Geschlechterverhältnis?” in *Revolution und Emanzipation: Geschlechterordnungen in Europa um 1800*, eds. Katharina Rennhak and Virginia Richter (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), 17–32.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion: Zur Codierung von Intimität* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 163–82.

middle according to gender roles; rather, we are faced with a “dual patterning of the process of modernisation” (Klinger), since both the bourgeois family and its image of women are essentially modern constructs. Thus, the costs of modernity were articulated early on. If a woman wanted to escape her self-incurred immaturity, she had to pay with a loss of meaning, security, and identity. The alienation resulting from man’s domination of the world, growing social atomization, anonymization, and the division of labor were common experiences suffered by the whole of society. They are reflected in the political theories and social utopias written by both men and women of the period. Women authors invariably took a progressive stance with regard to gender relations and were also active in furthering the cause of working-class emancipation.

#### DESIRE AND AFFECT

Reactions to the processes of modernization have been described collectively as a ‘romantic syndrome’. This syndrome occurs wherever commitment turns into disappointment during revolutionary processes.<sup>10</sup> Reactions of this sort also allow us to diagnose a ‘desire for affect’. Given the current popularity of the affective, the affect has even been cast as a Foucauldian disposition: discourses of power, law, and truth knot together and shape both institutional practices and subjective desires.<sup>11</sup> In the romantic period, an interest in the emotions and affects articulated itself both in the arts and in theoretical writings. Aesthetics, as a theory both of perception and of beauty, enjoyed great currency during this period, which is not least evidenced by the fact that the term ‘avant-garde’, hitherto used exclusively in a politico-military context, was now applied to artists. What united these avant-garde artists, irrespective of which individual branch of the arts they were engaged in, was that they were all capable of ‘sensation’.<sup>12</sup>

Desires in general, but also particular affects such as indignation or enthusiasm, where they involved a social and political dimension, became the subject of inquiry and debate. Anthropological materialism takes this development into account when it turns its attention to man as a sensual and affective being. The material world – nature as a whole, but also the human body and the human collective – now acquired a history. Not only the natural history of the world, but also the history of societies (Condorcet, Saint-Simon, Fourier) were

<sup>10</sup> Cornelia Klinger, *Flucht Trost Revolte: Die Moderne und ihre ästhetischen Gegenwelten* (Munich: Hanser, 1995), 61–90. Klinger identifies a second critical phase just after World War I, and a third post-1968.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Marie-Luise Angerer, *Begehren nach dem Affekt* (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Olinde Rodriguez, ‘L’artiste, le savant et l’industriel’ (1825), in Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, *Œuvres complètes* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1977), 5:204.

now organized according to distinct periods. And just as the sensual nature of the individual constituted this individual's positive linchpin, the senses in their social context were no longer taboo and experienced a positive revaluation. The aim was to move away from the (social) body as an alienated entity bound by rigid sexual morals and toward a comprehensively lived eroticism (Fourier) and the 'emancipation of the flesh' (Enfantin). Following a remarkably similar line of argument, the social models and manifestos of this period sought to overcome exploitative working conditions and envisaged an environment in which work would constitute a tangibly meaningful experience. In this context, the anthropological dimension of work was conceived of in positive terms and now formed an essential part of what it meant to be human, both in terms of the individual and in terms of society. In Germany, it was the individual who took center stage in these discourses; in France, by contrast, the focus lay on the collective and thus also on gender and class relations. Here, anthropological materialism was reflected in the socialist utopias and physiologies of the time.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Fourier*

Charles Fourier (1772–1837) not only championed the social emancipation of women, but also demanded that men and women should enjoy an equal right to passion. In his own way committed to the Enlightenment, yet polemically distancing himself from the French Revolution and the Enlightenment faith in reason, Fourier explicitly focused on desire and affect. If the marquis de Sade represented the extreme of cruelty, Fourier stood for the extreme idyll. Both lent expression to the interlinking relationship between industrial and instinct-driven culture. Starting from a critique of contemporary society, Fourier proceeded to develop ideas for potential social change. His thinking is rooted in the fundamentally passionate nature of man and thus grounds a future society in affectivity. According to Fourier's fundamental hypothesis, every passionate desire is destined to be fulfilled. His erotic project, however, does not privilege the traditional model of the exclusive male–female couple relationship. On the contrary, all his writings aim at abolishing monogamous marriage and the nuclear family,

<sup>13</sup> Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 633. In *The Arcades Project* Walter Benjamin tried to describe modernity, as a historical period, in terms of the phenomena it had engendered. In this context, nineteenth-century France, and Paris in particular, seemed a particularly suitable object of inquiry to him. The present chapter owes many crucial impulses to Benjamin's epistemological and historicophilosophical approach, as well as to his detailed observations and insightful readings.

which he views as antisocial institutions par excellence. Fourier's 'phalanxes' ('*Phalanstère*') project a space that functions as residential and work space in one. In terms of human relationships, the building represents the basic social unit that is to supersede the nuclear family. Rather than small, family-based units, Fourier's community required larger numbers of people to guarantee the widest possible diversity of passions, which could then be combined to suit. Crucial in this context are the three 'distributive' passions, which also function as combinatory rules: *cabaliste*, or quarrelsomeness, which integrates and fuels competition; *papillonne*, or the drive for change, which keeps boredom at bay and meets our desire for variety and diversion; and *composite*, which denotes enthusiasm or solidarity, for "true happiness solely consists in satisfying all one's passions."<sup>14</sup> Notably, this is not the same as satisfying all desires – far from it, in fact. It would be "a grave error to believe that nature is miserly with her talents; she is prodigal far beyond our needs or desires; you only need to learn to discover and develop the seeds."<sup>15</sup>

The value of a social utopia such as Fourier's does not primarily lie in its actual realization, even if it does partake in a certain degree of reality; countering charges of irrationalism, the notion of the 'reality of utopias' was proposed.<sup>16</sup> There were countless attempts to put utopian projects into practice, but all of them failed within a short space of time. The strength of the social utopia thus rather lies in its dual capacity to deliver, through fiction, an effective critique of contemporary reality and, at the same time, to raise possibilities for actual change. This becomes apparent once we consider that the utopias of the first few decades of the nineteenth century cannot simply be reduced to their founding texts, but also engendered practical realities such as the model communities established by some of Fourier's followers. The establishment of collective realities also gave meaning to the hopes and fears that had arisen from political and economic change.

### Démar

The Saint-Simonian Claire Démar (ca. 1800–33) addressed the issue of desire from a decidedly female perspective. Criticizing the status quo for its blatant political and erotic inequalities, she put forward her own programme in *Ma loi d'avenir* (My Law of the Future). The Saint-Simonian leader Enfantin attacked the politics of violence and war and instead advocated a society in which the different classes would live together in harmony and equality. The path to such a peaceful society would not lead via reason, but love, and it is precisely at this

<sup>14</sup> Fourier, *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, 83.

<sup>15</sup> Fourier, *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, 84.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *Le réel de l'utopie: Essai sur le politique au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).



point that women become crucial to Saint-Simonian theory. Not only did the assumption of a “natural” difference between the sexes and, correspondingly, the assumption of their naturally different qualities – male reflection and female sentiment – encourage awareness of gender issues, but women were also addressed directly and the programmatic call for a papal couple and a female messiah seemed, among other things, to enhance women’s status. At the same time, however, Saint-Simonism circumscribed female self-emancipation. While Enfantin advocated “free love,” he also introduced highly normative and authoritarian notions of human and sexual behavior, which viewed relations between the sexes as essentially complementary and invariably assigned women the role of the loving mother, the embodiment of “man’s better half.”

It was precisely this aspect of Enfantin’s Saint-Simonism that Claire Démar took as her starting point. Like Fourier, she reflected upon social conditions and described female socialization as a structural process that systematically deprived women of their rights, kept them in ignorance, and ultimately enslaved them. Unlike Fourier, however, Démar wrote from the perspective of someone with firsthand experience of powerlessness and existential despair. Arguing against a normative notion of femininity prescribed by marital and domestic stability, but also opposing the new Saint-Simonian moral code, she called for a woman’s right to sexual self-determination. With *My Law of the Future* (published posthumously in 1834), Démar set out her very own sexual code and took the postulate of the emancipation of the flesh literally:

Even if one recognises the existence of the intimate, secret and mysterious relations between two souls, and even if one feels a perfect unity of sentiment, thought and volition; all this may yet be shattered in the face of the last decisive, though necessary and indispensable test. The test of matter by matter, the trial of the flesh by the flesh!!!<sup>17</sup>

Démar ultimately failed, indeed foundered on her attempt to live according to her own law. Her letters bear witness to the despair she felt in the face of her social isolation, and they speak of her longing for peace and quiet. Her suicide note gives an insight into her troubled love affair with Perret Désassarts, the very man with whom she chose to die in a double suicide pact.

In her *Law*, Démar rejected Enfantin’s notion of peaceful female harmony and even argued for political activism and violence; for her, women’s sexual emancipation was fundamentally linked to their political emancipation: “I am no pacifist; I am *still a woman of the barricades*; ... I am still not sufficiently religious to hope for *good* to come from those who make the people *suffer* invoking the principle

<sup>17</sup> Claire Démar, *Ma loi d’avenir*, in *Appel au peuple sur l’affranchissement de la femme*, ed. Valentin Pelosse (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), 89.

that *might* is right. No! A thousandfold no! Barricades! ... Cannon balls into their palaces! ... Bullets into their brains!"<sup>18</sup> Her dissent in questions of politics and desire not only made Démar a dissident, but also rendered her, in the eyes of the Saint-Simonians, a heretic. The sanctions imposed were not religious or formal, and there was no inquisition or excommunication; rather, Démar suffered the mundane and informal, but no less effective, punishment of social isolation. She was shunned even by fellow Saint-Simonian feminists, particularly by those involved in journals such as *La Femme Libre* (The Free Woman) and *Tribune des Femmes* (The Women's Tribune), who felt that she was taking too radical a stance. Démar rebelled against the prevailing inequality that characterized both the social utopias and, most importantly, the social practices of her day, and she invoked her own and often highly personal experiences as testimony and proof of the truth of her arguments. In view of this, it is not surprising that her 'law' was caught up in a familiar constellation, namely, the opposition between the law of authority and the law of truth – an opposition famously encapsulated in Thomas Hobbes's formula *Auctoritas, non veritas facit legem* (It is not truth but authority that makes the law). Démar advocated a secular exercise of the senses, and she bore out her convictions in life as well as in death. She emphasized the material, the physical nature of men and women, and thus made clear that desire did not necessarily have to be concomitant with spiritual meaning; rather, it systematically allied itself to political practice.

#### TECHNOLOGY AND LABOR

It is no coincidence that many of the early French socialists were engineers and public servants by profession. The Saint-Simonians in particular counted overwhelming numbers of École polytechnique graduates among their members. They felt close to the state, their conception of life was based on the insights of engineering, and their notion of society was rooted in hierarchical organizational and administrative structures. Politics was conceived as the technology of life and thus also marked a chapter of what Michel Foucault has called "bio-power." Consider, for example, the following statement by the Fourierite Victor Considérant: "POLITICS is the *science of existence, of the life of societies, the knowledge about the fundamental laws of hygiene of the social body.*"<sup>19</sup> The ideal of an ordered (and thus healthy and happy) life as projected by Fourier and Saint-Simon centrally featured a well-functioning social mechanism. Accordingly, the engineers

<sup>18</sup> Claire Démar, "11e lettre au Père Enfantin" (end of January/beginning of February 1833), in *Appel*, 58–9.

<sup>19</sup> Victor Considérant, *Bases de la politique positive: Manifeste de l'École fondée par Fourier*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Bureaux de la Phalange, 1842), 32.

tended to conceive of social conditions and human relations more in terms of cooperation than in terms of conflict.<sup>20</sup> This also held true for the flow of capital and the railway network. The function of capitalism was perceived to lie in connecting ideas with the productive forces. And if the discipline of monastic life was deemed the precursor of Western mechanization,<sup>21</sup> the utopian schemes, too, were reminiscent of monastic forms of life – consider, for example, Fourier’s architectural projects or his two-hour work cycles.

Industrialization profoundly changed the very concept of technology. On the one hand, technology denoted something very practical. The age of coal, steel, and steam found an emblematic expression in the railways, which emerged in Europe and the United States between 1820 and 1830. Unlike the stagecoach, the railway system represented the first means of mass transportation. It signified an important shift in the formation of the masses and constituted a “historical signature.”<sup>22</sup> This formation of the masses involved the body and the imagination alike. Now, objects, people, and societies could be linked with one another in an overarching network of relations, and the contemporary utopias reflected this development. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the promises held out by this network only increased as the telegraph and then the telephone were invented and became widely used. For the Saint-Simonians, industrial progress equaled multiplied channels of communication, which stimulated production and trade. To these engineers, technological progress held the key to a better society.

Nevertheless, these utopias also reveal a certain ambivalence in their attitude toward technology; while technology raised immense hope, it also posed significant threats. In his readings of Fourier, Walter Benjamin tried to anchor technology in politics. Benjamin’s “true politician” knows that technology is not a fetish of doom, but rather a key to happiness. According to Benjamin, our dealings with technology pose particular challenges; the exercise can turn on its head at any time; it can train the subject in handling machines, but it can also subjugate the subject. For technology to honor its promise of liberation, it requires a skillfulness that can only be achieved by practice. When Benjamin, in *The Arcades Project*, describes revolution as an “innervation of the technical organs of the collective,” he compares it to the phenomenally rapid proliferation of the Fourierian phalanxes. According to Benjamin, humanity could deal with its body in a different way to that of the masses mobilized by fascism. And in spite of Fourier’s pathos vis-à-vis technology and the machine, his utopian writings do allow some insight

<sup>20</sup> Antoine Picon, *Les saint-simoniens: Raison, imaginaire et utopie* (Paris: Belin, 2002), 203–20.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, 1963), 12–18.

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 602.

into what technology could be – if it does not, as in war, simply link enormous means with minimal moral illumination and thus proves that the project of a harmonious interplay of society and technology has failed.<sup>23</sup>

### *Saint-Simon*

Like Fourier, Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) ranked among the early socialists or, as Marx called them, the utopian socialists. As an engineer, Saint-Simon worked on several large-scale transport projects, a canal connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific in Central America and a canal project linking Madrid with the open sea, among them. Saint-Simon opposed too narrow a perspective on political economy (Adam Smith) and defined politics as the “science of production.” Even though he himself was active and indeed successful within the existing economic framework, he criticized the current state of affairs and envisaged a better future society on the basis of new technical possibilities. To this end, he intended to raise funds, take the instruments of labor and government out of the hands of aristocratic “idlers,” and bestow them instead on the “producers” in science, the arts, and trade and commerce. No longer turning to a progressive ruler and not yet appealing directly to the people, Saint-Simon looked to the financial and industrial bourgeoisie and put his faith in industrialists (the producers) and intellectuals. Initially, the liberal bourgeoisie supported his opposition to aristocratic restoration efforts, but they increasingly turned away from Saint-Simon as his support for the cause of the workers seemed to threaten bourgeois privileges.

In his anonymous *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève à ses contemporains* (Letters of an Inhabitant of Geneva to His Contemporaries) (1803), Saint-Simon called for leadership in society to be conferred upon scientists and demanded that all members of society ought to be required to spend their working life in a manner that would be useful to the community. The social hierarchy was to be transformed according to the principles of “social physiology”; only the aristocracy and the clergy were to be abolished altogether. For Saint-Simon, the revolutionary call for equality was a revolutionary passion rather than a formal principle of social change. With the proclamation of human rights, the issue of liberty had been raised, illustrating a historical conception of events. The scientific revolution proclaimed by Saint-Simon grounded itself in industrial society and in the positivist method (for a time, Auguste Comte acted as Saint-Simon's assistant) – both were

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 631 [W7.4]; Benjamin, *Theorien des deutschen Faschismus* (1930), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 3:238.

to effect social change. In Saint-Simon's case, the "reality of utopia" lies once again in the fact that he voiced concrete criticisms and, unlike Fourier and some of his later followers, actually involved himself in politics. Both the man and his writings thus actively contributed to transforming received opinions and helped to popularize the idea of social emancipation – an emancipation that was no longer conceived negatively in terms of a liberation from social fetters, but rather positively as a release of human productivity and creative power, which led Saint-Simon to praise work in the most euphoric terms.

Why the utopian outlook? Saint-Simon did not simply content himself with criticizing current conditions. In the *Organisateur* (Organizer), a series of writings published between 1819 and 1820, he described the eighteenth century as the century of criticism but stated that, for the nineteenth century, criticism alone would no longer suffice:

No system (including political systems) can be replaced by the criticism that undermined it; in order to supersede a system, one needs a system. The philosophers of the eighteenth century had to be critical, for it was, to start with, necessary to show up the evils of a system that had emerged during a period of superstition and barbarism. Now that they have delivered their devastating critique, however, their successors, the contemporary philosophers, are left with the sole task of developing and elaborating upon a political system that corresponds to the current state of enlightenment.<sup>24</sup>

This series of writings was intended to test all those questions, and their answers were then to advance the happiness of society; the ultimate goal was the discovery of the perfect mechanism of social organization, well oiled, smoothly conceived, and held out as a target to aim for. Taking a rationalist perspective, Saint-Simon reduced social practice to a purely organizational problem that revolved around the issue of production – society as a gigantic industrial concern (see also *Essais sur l'organisation sociale*, 1804). What was new about this approach was that both the organization of labor and the political economy were now linked to the question of technology. Saint-Simon never presented a coherent account of his ideas, but this does not detract from the lasting impact of his legacy. Echoes are, for example, clearly present in John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), although Mill's sociophilosophical ideas owe, according to Mill himself, their fundamental contours to Harriet Taylor-Mill.

After Saint-Simon's death in 1825, his successors Olinde Rodrigues (1794–1851), Barthélémy-Prosper Enfantin (1796–1864), and Saint-Amand Bazard (1791–1832) attempted to systematize – and thus also to dogmatize – his writings, first in the form of various lecture series and later, in 1830, in the form of the *Doctrine de Saint-Simon: Exposition*. The term 'doctrine' here denotes a

<sup>24</sup> Saint-Simon, *Organisateur*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 6–7.

comprehensive program that aimed to provide a global solution to the problems of people and society, focusing not on the class divide, but rather on the collective as a whole. It held out the promise of being everything in one – a message of hope as well as a science, religion as well as philosophy. This promise certainly fell on fertile ground. In France, the late 1820s and early 1830s were characterized by social unrest, two revolutions (1830 and 1832), and a crisis of moral, religious, and political values that conjured up an almost apocalyptic atmosphere. It was against this backdrop that Saint-Simonism emerged as a movement and became a platform for theoretical as well as practical social criticism. Women and workers accounted for a sizable portion of its audience. Under *Enfantin*, another engineer, Saint-Simonism transformed itself from a political movement into a post-revolutionary Christian sect that described its own teachings as a religion, itself as a church, and its leaders as priests. When Heinrich Heine arrived in Paris in 1834, he soon attended Saint-Simonist meetings and dedicated his *De l'Allemagne* (On Germany) (1835) to *Enfantin*. Notably, however, he deleted this dedication when preparing a new edition of the book twenty years later, for “today, most of these martyrs are rich; several of them are newly wealthy millionaires and more than one of them has gained most distinguished and lucrative positions – people do indeed travel fast on the railways. The erstwhile apostles, who dreamed of a golden age for all, now content themselves with hailing the silver age of money, the rule of this money-god.”<sup>25</sup>

#### Fourier

When Hegel described the structural link between bourgeois society and a capitalist economy, he recognized poverty as a structural problem. However, the proletarian masses, after all a product of capitalist industrialization, did not occupy any relevant place in his system of thought. Hegel's definition of *labor* as an externalization of the laborer, developed on the basis of the master-slave dialectic, could not sufficiently account for the working conditions of the proletariat. It was Saint-Simon who cast property relations as a question of class while, in contrast to Fourier's phalansteric, cooperative economy, still working within the framework of bourgeois enterprise. The new system envisaged by Saint-Simon was to build upon his emphatic conception of labor and its optimistic definition of humans as essentially creative and productive beings. The social conditions and dynamics of the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, rather belied the revolutionary triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity. As a man employed in

<sup>25</sup> Heinrich Heine, *De L'Allemagne*, rev. ed., 1855, Avant-Propos, in *Sämtliche Schriften in zwölf Bänden*, ed. Klaus Briegleb (Munich: Hanser, 1976), 11: 440.

trade, Fourier had been keenly aware of the economic changes these conditions engendered – changes that had to be viewed in the context of a ‘romantic economy’: an interdependency of scarcity, shortages, and debt, organized in a mode of credit and deferred payments. It was in this way that a new relationship among economics, the populace, and biopolitics articulated itself.<sup>26</sup>

In his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith defined monetary economy as the basis of the new political economy. No longer founded on a general model that could compensate for surpluses, the crucial point now lay in generating scarcity. Hardship, poverty, and decline thus seemed inherent in the system. According to Thomas Robert Malthus’s *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798/1803), population growth tends to precede expansion of the population’s resources, in particular, the primary resource of food. While populations grow at a geometric rate, food resources increase at an arithmetic rate. Thus, famine and mass poverty are bound to occur; the other side of the coin is the pursuit of profit. Since the late eighteenth century, labor had no longer been motivated and limited by need, want, and demand. Now wealth was considered productive if it exceeded need; labor was considered productive if it did not stop once a need was met. The new political economy emerged at the point of “transition from limited needs to unlimited desires.”<sup>27</sup> Analogously, the amount of time and effort expended on work exceeded people’s capacity to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Labor could thus only be relevant in conjunction with scarcity and hardship.

The preceding paragraph raises two important points, the first of which Fourier reinforced and the second of which he contradicted. He, too, was no fan of limitations, be they limitations of needs or of desires. His economy indulged in luxury and operated on abundance. He opposed an economy of shortages that was grounded in scarcity and produced hardship. Fourier criticized the imbalance of production and consumption, which imposed labor as a punishment on most of mankind and divorced people from the pleasures of life. Instead, he advocated the merging of production, distribution, and consumption. To counter the notion of labor as an odious chore, Fourier made the case for enshrining the right to work as a human right. He put his faith in the attractiveness of labor, an attractiveness grounded in an economy of affective tensions (*travail affectif*). According to Fourier, variety and mutual exchange defined the proper division of labor, since they challenged the individual and aroused the passions. His new social order would thus be capable of “transforming the most daunting tasks into

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Joseph Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft: Poetik des ökonomischen Menschen* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2004), 255–88.

<sup>27</sup> Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 339.

a festival by making them interesting,” not least because laborers “have to change their work at least every two hours.”<sup>28</sup> To Fourier, the transformation of labor into pleasure (*plaisir*) and delight bore enormous creative potential that could ultimately change the entire world.

The tasks and activities that Fourier wants us to alternate encompass everything human beings do: work, production, action, thought. These broad categories include a wide variety of pursuits and pleasures, cooking as well as eating; love acts as well as the cultivation of obsessions. This broadens the concept of work, which, for Fourier, ultimately encompasses all these activities. Fourier did not differentiate between work and leisure, and only idleness was excluded in his list. It is the power of the imagination that here transforms the current economic system into a passionate future one. The imagination, according to Kant a productive cognitive faculty, is capable not only of sensualizing something that “exceeds the boundaries of experience,” but also of realizing the unconscious. In Fourier’s writings, the imagination links in with collective desire, the mechanisms of a market economy, and a critical analysis of experiential reality.

### *Considérant*

The engineer Victor Considérant (1808–93) is commonly regarded as the figurehead of the *école sociétaire* movement, which emerged in the wake of Fourier’s ideas. Not only lessons, but also the press served the movement as vehicles for disseminating and popularizing their ideas. Considérant founded and headed several magazines, *La Phalange* and *La Démocratie pacifique* (The Peaceful Democracy), among them. He was personally involved in the establishment of phalansteric cooperatives in the United States, such as ‘La Réunion’ in Texas; phalansterically inspired communes could be found as far afield as Russia. After Fourier’s death, Considérant tried to persuade the Fourierists to take an active part in the political process and to join the peaceful struggle for a democratic republic. He also elaborated on Fourier’s idea of a right to labor, an idea that would, bar its erotic components, become a key concept for French socialists in the 1848 revolution. By rehabilitating man and his affects as an *animal passionnel*, he could successfully argue that human beings found their first and most fundamental expression in their right to labor, understood as their right to life. In other words, human beings were understood in their existential materiality, a materiality that was to be secured in the context of society as a whole – life is collective labor. Considérant offered a definition of industry that was more comprehensive than our contemporary understanding of the

<sup>28</sup> Fourier, *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, 177, 171.



term; it is probably best rendered in English as ‘production’: “The term *industry* has a very broad meaning in sociological discourse. *Industry* is the sum total of all branches of people’s *productive activity*; it comprises agricultural, domestic, manufacturing, trade, educational, scientific and artistic labours.”<sup>29</sup> And in the *Doctrine of Saint-Simon*, we read: “Science knows, while industry creates.”<sup>30</sup> Industry’s mission was nothing less than the transformation of the entire planet, and true to this concept, labor was to be understood as productive labor. In order to make labor productive and thus attractive to people, the task, with Fourier, was to abolish the repulsive character of labor, which chiefly consisted in insufficient remuneration, unsafe workshops, isolated working conditions (as opposed to group labor), excessively long working hours, monotony, and a lack of rivalry (see §17).

### Owen

The English textile industry employed steam engines and developed spinning frames and power looms early on in the history of industrialization, as a result of which factories replaced smaller, traditional mills much earlier than on the Continent. Consequently, the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution, such as pauperism and mass destitution, were felt sooner in Britain than elsewhere. Unlike Fourier, who, tellingly and in spite of his concept of industry, still envisaged essentially agricultural cooperatives, the British mill owner Robert Owen (1771–1858) was a man of the industrial age. The hardship and distress brought about by industrialization were, in his view, not the result of technology, but rather that of property ownership structures. Machines should not be viewed as competing with human labor but ought rather to be utilized under the direction of communal human endeavor. As early as 1799, Owen improved the working and living condition of his employees and their dependents in his New Lanark mills. Putting his faith in progress, he also aimed at the steady improvement of the human character, which, to him and in opposition to prevailing religious views, was not a matter of individual effort. Rather, Owen saw man’s character as chiefly determined by his social environment and thus conceived of its improvement as an essentially social task. Hence, he also sought to banish “from the mind of man all ideas of merit or demerit in any created object or being.”<sup>31</sup> This, however, also

<sup>29</sup> Victor Considérant, *Exposition abrégée du système phalanstérien de Fourier*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Librairie sociétaire, 1845), 16 (§6).

<sup>30</sup> *Doctrine de Saint-Simon, Exposition, Deuxième année*, ed. Émile Barrault (Paris: Bureau de l’organisateur, 1830), 155.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Owen, *The Social System* (1826–7), in *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, ed. Gregory Claeys, vol. 2, *The Development of Socialism* (London: William Pickering, 1993), 65.

entailed a critique of free will and of the “unfortunate” “theories of free agency and responsibility.” Owen firmly held

*that external circumstances may be so formed as to have an overwhelming and irresistible influence over every infant that comes into existence, either for good or evil; to compel him to receive any particular sentiments or habits, to surround him through life with the most agreeable or disagreeable objects, and thus, at pleasure, make any portion, or the whole of the human race, poor, ignorant, vicious, and wretched; or affluent, intelligent, virtuous, and happy.*<sup>32</sup>

His theory of social and environmental conditioning is reminiscent of the biological theories put forward by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who, in his 1809 *Philosophie zoologique*, outlined the transformation of the species. Owen pursued the idea of a purposeful transformation of society. If one wanted people to be happier, it was not enough to rely, in a utilitarian manner, on the free market. Rather, one needed radically to transform general living conditions: “This new order of things will gradually supersede the commercial system.”<sup>33</sup> In practice, this meant changing social relations, the economy, and the education system. These changes were to be achieved by, among other things, the abolishment of religion, private property, and marriages of convenience. Owen even developed a constitution for his ideal community, which included laws and regulations.<sup>34</sup> His sharp eye for working conditions and economic relations was that of a businessman rather than that of an engineer. In 1825, he sold his cotton mills and left for the United States, where he lectured on social improvement before the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. (in the presence of the president), and founded the socio-utopian community New Harmony.

### Tristan

In 1839, Flora Tristan (1803–44) spent several months in England and wrote a number of articles on factories, slums, and public houses. The early industrial manufactory system underwent crucial changes during the 1830s. As large-scale industries took hold, the proletarianization of the urban masses gathered pace, first in England and then, around 1840, in France as well. Tristan’s articles, published as *Promenades dans Londres* (The London Journal), bear witness to these developments. Her book includes the following dedication: “Men and women of the working class, I dedicate my book to *all of you*; I wrote it so that you might understand your plight, therefore it belongs to you.”<sup>35</sup> In her writings, Tristan analyzed

<sup>32</sup> Owen, *Second Discourse on a New System of Society* (1825), in *Selected Works*, 19–20.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *Social System*, 71.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, *Social System*, chap. V.

<sup>35</sup> *The London Journal of Flora Tristan, 1842: The Aristocracy and the Working Class of England*, trans. Jean Hawkes (London: Virago, 1982), 1.

the working and general living conditions of English wage laborers, women, and children. Her critique of the general desolation she had encountered (child prostitution, for example) was not moral, but rather economic, and she held capitalism responsible for these ills:

The great struggle, the struggle which is destined to transform the social order, is between landowners and capitalists on the one hand, and urban and rural workers on the other: that is, between men who possess both wealth and power, and for whose profit the land is governed; and men who possess nothing – no land, capital or political power – yet pay two-thirds of the taxes, provide recruits for the army and navy, and are starved by the rich whenever it suits their interests to make them work for less pay.<sup>36</sup>

Tristan also offered advice on armed resistance against the state and thus sided with revolutionary violence. Her book proved a success both with the French public and with the social-reformist and socialist press (Robert Owen was among the commentators who received its publication with enthusiasm).

After her observations in England, and considering the ineffectiveness of existing reform efforts, Tristan began to develop recommendations and measures designed to improve the general living conditions of the working class. In 1843, she published *The Workers' Union*, an important socialist manifesto predating the *Communist Manifesto*. In it, she called upon all workers of all nations to unite in the cause of the self-governed emancipation of the working classes and put forward proposals as to how this could be achieved: "To Working Men and Women ... there is nothing more to be said, nothing more to be written, for your wretched position is well known by all. Only one thing remains to be done: *to act by virtue of the rights inscribed in the Charter*. / Now the day has come when one must *act*, and it is up to you and *only* you to act in the interest of your own cause."<sup>37</sup>

In *The Workers' Union*, Tristan linked the question of the workers to that of women. According to her, women were held in "terrible condemnation, repeated for six thousand years." In view of the inequality and oppression suffered by workers and women alike, Tristan appealed to the working classes to declare their solidarity with women: "workers, it is up to you, who are the victims of real inequality and injustice, to establish the rule of justice and absolute equality between man and woman on this earth."<sup>38</sup> The concept of class served Tristan as the prime category by which to analyze the different strata of society, while the concept of race served the same purpose in respect of women, regardless of their social class: "Up to now, woman has counted for nothing in human society. What

<sup>36</sup> *The London Journal of Flora Tristan* 1842, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Flora Tristan, *The Workers' Union*, trans. Beverly Livingston (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 37–8.

<sup>38</sup> Tristan, *The Workers' Union*, 76, 87.

has been the result of this? That the priest, the lawmaker, and the philosopher have treated her as a true *pariah*. Woman (one half of humanity) has been cast out of the Church, out of the law, out of society.”<sup>39</sup>

### Marx

The concept of class was also fundamental to Karl Marx’s (1818–83) *Communist Manifesto*. There, he programmatically stated that class struggle was the primary moving cause behind all history and the only chance of emancipating the working class. Even though all male members of the bourgeois society were formally regarded as free and equal before the law, the bourgeois order upheld, according to Marx, social inequality and, indeed, reproduced it. Thus, the workers could, in effect, only choose to whom they sold their labor. For Marx, it was not enough to improve and thus reform the situation of the workers and the relations of bourgeois production. Real change could only be effected by means of revolution, that is, by changing the relationship between capital and waged labor; this meant that the existing relations of production had to be abolished.

Since the emergence of the proletariat went hand in hand with industrialization, the question of technology was also a topical one. Marx was interested in how the deployment of machines affected production. For him, machinery was a means of production, just as the objects of labor in nature or in work processes in general. He defined the machine as a capitalist phenomenon, as “a means for producing surplus value.”<sup>40</sup> Machines merely performed an intermediary function since they were only aids to the production of surplus value; in themselves, they were not capable of generating surplus value.<sup>41</sup> The deployment of machines increased productivity and intensified labor. If Marx emphasized the fluent passage from one production step to another in artisanship, the assembly line factory worker, by contrast, was faced with a reified labor task completely divorced from any processuality. “Every kind of capitalist production ... has this in common, that it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labour, but the instruments of labour that employ the workman. But it is only in the factory system that this inversion for the first time acquires technical and palpable reality.”<sup>42</sup> In a bourgeois context, technology served the purpose of taming and oppressing the workers, reducing them to a mere “appendage of the machine.”<sup>43</sup> “The lightning

<sup>39</sup> Tristan, *The Workers’ Union*, 76.

<sup>40</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975–) [henceforth Marx, CW], 35, 374; *Marx Engels Werke*, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (Berlin: Dietz, 1961–6) [henceforth Marx, MEW], 23, 391.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Marx, CW 35, 390 (Marx, MEW 23, 408).

<sup>42</sup> Marx, CW 35, 426 (Marx, MEW 23, 446).

<sup>43</sup> Marx, CW 6, 490–1. (Marx, MEW 4, 468).

of the labour, even, becomes a sort of torture, since the machine does not free the labourer from work, but deprives the work of all interest.”<sup>44</sup>

To Marx, technology stood in a dialectical relationship with society. Technology could, under different social conditions – which, for Marx, also meant within a different economic system – bring forth different effects. Hence, he rejected any form of technological determinism, be it an optimistic one, as in Saint-Simon, or a pessimistic one, as expressed in the attacks on machines perpetrated by workers who held the machines responsible for their increasing exploitation. According to Marx, their fallacy lay in confusing social forms of exploitation with the material means of production.<sup>45</sup> In reality, machines were not capable of controlling or exploiting human beings; rather, the capitalists controlled the workers by means of the machine. The crucial question for Marx was how one dealt with technology. In principle, technology could be a means of making people’s lives easier and more self-determined; it is its capitalist usage that effects exploitation, unemployment, and poverty.

Marx analyzed labor from a variety of perspectives; in his philosophical works, labor functions as a central theoretical category. In our context, it is important to emphasize what characterizes labor for Marx and what its anthropological function is within the frame of a commodified society. Only on this basis will we be able to understand his analyses and critique of the working conditions of his day both in philosophical and in historical, sociological, economic, and political terms. To start with, labor in the specific historical context of capitalism is conceived as a creative activity that allows people to define themselves as human beings. “In creating a *world of objects* by his practical activity, in his *work upon* inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species-being.”<sup>46</sup>

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature’s productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway.<sup>47</sup>

In capitalism, labor is considered to be a productive activity. Man’s active participation in continual work processes is what Marx calls “living labour.” Once we reach the stage of the finished product, however, the work process has expired

<sup>44</sup> Marx, CW 35, 426 (Marx, MEW 23, 445–6).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Marx, CW 35, 431–2, 444 (Marx, MEW 23, 452, 465).

<sup>46</sup> Marx, CW 3, 276 (Marx, MEW 40, 516).

<sup>47</sup> Marx, CW 35, 187 (Marx, MEW 23, 192).

as labor and its object coincide at this point. This is what Marx calls objectified labor.<sup>48</sup> Every commodity is the result of “useful labour, i.e., productive activity of a definite kind and exercised with a definite aim.”<sup>49</sup> ‘Concrete labor’, that is, sensually perceivable, visible, audible, tangible labor, manifests itself in its use value, which belongs to the person who has created it. Such labor is to be distinguished from ‘abstract labor’, the “*function* of labor as a socially mediating activity”<sup>50</sup> specific to capitalism: a formation where labor produces the values of commodities and in this constitutes a social structure of totality.<sup>51</sup> As long as there is only an exchange of equivalents, there is no capitalist wealth; such wealth only emerges with the category of profit or interest. Then we have wealth as a product of an excess of labor. Marx himself emphasized the importance of the distinction between these two concepts of labor: for him, the ‘twofold character of the labor embodied in commodities’ marked “the pivot on which a clear comprehension of political economy turns.”<sup>52</sup> Abstraction from the particular characteristics of concrete labor is what produces exchange value in the first place: “Whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labour, the different kinds of labour expended upon them. We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it.”<sup>53</sup> Exchange value is a genuinely social phenomenon. The concept of value does not simply, nor naturally, arise as a result of (concrete) labor but rather emerges from labor as it is organized under the conditions of capitalism. Production feeds on inequality, power, and the appropriation of unpaid excess labor. Labor under these conditions lets the social character of labor appear as the objectified value of commodities – in Marx’s view the root of commodity fetishism in capitalist societies. Commodities are, as it were, objectified because a social property appears as a natural one. In his *Grundrisse*, Marx summarized this state of affairs as follows: “The economists regard people’s social relations of production, and the determinations acquired by things subsumed under these relations, as *natural properties* of the things. This crude materialism is an equally crude idealism, indeed a fetishism which ascribes to things social relations as determinations immanent to them, and thus mystifies them.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Marx, CW 35, 190–1 (Marx, MEW 23, 195).

<sup>49</sup> Marx, CW 35, 52 (Marx, MEW 23, 57).

<sup>50</sup> Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1993), 150.

<sup>51</sup> The constitution of value and its totalizing effects are at the center of the German postmillennial Marx debate too. For an overview see Ingo Elbe, “Soziale Form und Geschichte: Der Gegenstand des *Kapital* aus der Perspektive neuerer Marx-Lektüren,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 58, no. 2 (2010): 221–40.

<sup>52</sup> Marx, CW 35, 51 (Marx, MEW 23, 56).

<sup>53</sup> Marx, CW 35, 84–5 (Marx, MEW 23, 88).

<sup>54</sup> Marx, CW 29, 77 (Marx, MEW 42, 588); cf. Marx, CW 35, 81–94, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof” (Marx, MEW 23, 85–98).

Only if we are prepared to analyze exchange value as a social phenomenon can we critique it effectively.

For Marx, alienated labor occurs wherever a worker sells his or her labor as a commodity and receives wages in exchange. Marx's analysis "proceed[s] from an *actual* fact. / The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates."<sup>55</sup> Consequently, capitalist exploitation alienates, dehumanizes, and degrades wage laborers:

within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power.<sup>56</sup>

Exploitation and alienation thus have their roots in the relationship between the workers and the means of production. This relationship is determined by the social system in which it occurs. Related to the analysis of the duality of labor in capitalism (concrete and abstract labor), alienation is considered to be "the process of the objectification of abstract labor" "that entails the coming into being of human powers in alienated form."<sup>57</sup> Even though this process occurs beyond human control, it enables historical possibilities that people could act upon. Unlike earlier socialists, Marx did not bother to map out a communist utopia. Rather, he concentrated his efforts on analyzing the ruling capitalist system in order to be able to criticize it adequately.

### *Proudhon*

The slogan "property is theft," coined by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–65), derived from Proudhon's concept of labor, which he shared with many economists of his day: property is essentially the product of labor. For Proudhon, it followed that one could not own what one had not produced by means of one's own labor. Property as theft thus described the theft of the actual producer's possession. Proudhon distinguished between property and possession, since only

<sup>55</sup> Marx, CW 3, 271–2 (Marx, MEW 40:511). On alienation, see Allen Wood, *Karl Marx*, 2nd ed. (London: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 1–43, 44–60.

<sup>56</sup> Marx, CW 35, 639 (Marx, MEW 23, 674).

<sup>57</sup> Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 162.

the latter concept was rooted in actual labor. Accordingly, Proudhon's basic tenet proclaimed that the "labourer retains, even after receiving his wages, a natural right of property in the thing which he has produced."<sup>58</sup> Accumulated capital, meanwhile, was owned by society at large. Once again, this is an attack on the idle and unproductive proprietors of the means of production. Rather than seeking to take the class struggle to the streets, however, Proudhon put his faith in social justice. In his *Confessions d'un révolutionnaire* (The Confessions of a Revolutionary) (1849), he notes: "one should, before erecting something new, exit the contradiction and create a method of revolutionary invention, no longer a negative philosophy, but ... a positive one."<sup>59</sup> Proudhon opposed both revolutionary violence and the use of authoritarian means by 'revolutionaries'. Instead, he pursued the idea of reform, "the eternal course of revolutionary ideas, in a word, the philosophy of reforms" (20). Originally a typesetter by trade, Proudhon tried to effect change by disseminating his ideas in writing. He devised, as a program of social reform, a system of credit and exchange that was based on the concept of mutuality and, he believed, could bring about a 'workers' democracy'. Since, in Proudhon's view, all forms of government tended toward centralization and the curtailment of freedom, liberty and justice could only exist in a system of social and economic mutualism.<sup>60</sup> Proudhon envisaged the absence of all forms of government and defined anarchy in positive terms rather than as synonymous with chaos: "As man seeks justice in equality, so society seeks order in anarchy. / *Anarchy*, the absence of a master, of a sovereign, such is the form of government to which we are approaching every day."<sup>61</sup>

## REVOLUTION AND ETERNAL RECURRENCE

### *Bakunin*

Unlike Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76) combined his anarchism with revolutionary violence. In revolutionary circles, he became famous for the statement "The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too!"<sup>62</sup> Bakunin had read German philosophy at Moscow and was regarded as Russia's foremost expert on

<sup>58</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property?* eds. and trans. Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 88.

<sup>59</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Les confessions d'un révolutionnaire pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution de Février* (1849), in *Œuvres complètes* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1982), 7:177.

<sup>60</sup> See Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières* (1865), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, pt. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Proudhon, *What Is Property?* 208.

<sup>62</sup> [Bakunin writing as] Jules Elysard, "The Reaction in Germany" (1842), in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed. and trans. Sam Dolgoff (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 57.



Hegel. In 1840, he moved to Berlin and came into contact with members of the Hegelian Left; later, he would record in his *Confession*: “Metaphysics: I sought life in it, but it is tedious, has a lethal effect, I sought action, but metaphysics is complete idleness.... I abandoned philosophy and devoted myself instead to politics.”<sup>63</sup> For Bakunin, politics as practical philosophy meant that “the struggle is active thought, it is life, and such active and living thought is power.”<sup>64</sup>

While industrialization, and with it the social problems and revolts of the workers, advanced across Western Europe, the situation in Russia was very different indeed. In a tsarist society with virtually no middle class, the peasantry formed the majority of the Russian population while the aristocracy ruled in a feudal manner. Serfdom was legal in Russia until 1861; Western Europe had abolished this system of forced labor fifty years earlier. Even the abolition of serfdom, however, did not necessarily result in the freedom of the Russian peasants, who, more often than not, found themselves in dire straits and still economically dependent on their former masters. The first to voice social criticism were aristocrats who had enjoyed a French education and had visited France as part of their studies or in the course of the Napoleonic Wars. They protested against the tsar’s autocratic regime, against serfdom, police arbitrariness, and censorship. In 1825, they joined forces in the Decembrist Uprising, Bakunin’s father among the participants. The special situation in Russia had, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, repeatedly led to a split among Russian intellectuals into a so-called Western, that is, German- or French-influenced faction, on the one hand, and the Slavophiles advocating a Slavic, often exclusively Russian solution on the other.<sup>65</sup> Both sides criticized current social conditions. Initially, Bakunin shared pan-Slavic sentiments and supported pan-Slavic campaigns. In his *Appeal to the Slavs* (1848), for example, Bakunin linked social to national questions, since the Slavic people suffered additional and specific oppression on the grounds of their nationality. A similar line of argument was pursued by the Narodniks, Russian social revolutionaries, whose broad-church movement included bourgeois-democratic proponents of Enlightenment ideas and terrorists alike (Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Chernyshevsky both belonged to the Narodniks). Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy* (1873), his only book originally written in Russian, was aimed directly at the Narodniks and was read widely throughout Russia. Bakunin himself was

<sup>63</sup> Michail Bakunin, *Brief aus dem Gefängnis: Die Beichte*, trans. Paul Kersten (Berlin: Karin Kramer, 1988), 4.

<sup>64</sup> Michail Bakunin, *Das knuto-germanische Kaiserreich* (1871), in *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin: Karin Kramer, 1975), 1:36.

<sup>65</sup> The nineteenth-century debates on cultural philosophy cannot, however, be reduced to this common dichotomy. See Dirk Uffelmann, *Die russische Kulturophilie: Logik und Axiologie der Argumentation* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999).

active in several groups and secret societies and authored a number of programmatic manifestoes. "We thus want a radical and universal, but also a philosophical, political, economic and social revolution, so that not a drop remains of the current order, which is based on private property, exploitation, destitution, ignorance and all forms of authority, and so that a new society based on the development of the entire human personality in common solidarity, on complete liberty, factual equality, in a word, on the most consummate justice conceivable can follow."<sup>66</sup> What follow are calls for the destruction of all state agencies.

Bakunin's central concept is liberty, which he conceived of in truly radical terms. For him, the notion of liberty was already present in the scriptural Fall of Man: "Man has emancipated himself; he has separated himself from animality and constituted himself a man; he has begun his distinctively human history and development by an act of disobedience and science – that is, by rebellion and by thought."<sup>67</sup> In *God and the State* (written in 1871), Bakunin criticized all forms of religion as helpmates of the state; together, both institutions made human liberty impossible, and both stood for externally imposed authority and legislation. Unlike Marx, Bakunin categorically rejected any notion of statehood, since the state, as an institution, always claimed central authority regardless of its specific form of government or social system. "That is because no state, not even the most republican and democratic, not even the pseudo-popular state contemplated by Marx, in essence represents anything but government of the masses from above downward, by an educated and thereby privileged minority which supposedly understands the real interests of the people better than the people themselves."<sup>68</sup>

However, Bakunin also criticized an 'Idealist' notion of liberty, which found its limits in other individuals and was thus conceptually located outside society. Bakunin's concept of liberty, by contrast, was an essentially social one:

Man becomes conscious of himself and his humanity only in society and only by the collective action of the whole society.... The liberty of every individual is only the reflection of his own humanity, or his human right through the conscience of all free men ... I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free. The freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Mikail Bakunin, *Internationale Brüderschaft*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 3:81.

<sup>67</sup> Mikail Bakunin, *God and the State*, ed. Paul Avrich (New York: Dover, 1970), 12.

<sup>68</sup> Mikail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, ed. and trans. Marshall S. Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 24. Marx called for the dictatorship of the proletariat or for socialism as a transitional phase; he reserved the term "communism" for a truly classless society that would no longer have any need of a state.

<sup>69</sup> Mikail Bakunin, Unfinished note on *God and the State*, in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 236–7.

The individual could and indeed had to rebel against the state; rebellion against society, by contrast, was, in Bakunin's view, impossible, indeed inconceivable. His anarchism sought to liberate the practical potential of the masses. To this end, Bakunin favored spontaneous and constantly evolving revolutionary practice from below over any sort of theory. He opposed any form of government in which the majority was ruled by a minority, including the tightly organized labor movement and the Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat.

### *Blanqui*

Bakunin is representative of a new sociological type that emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century: the professional revolutionary. Also belonging to this category was Bakunin's great opponent Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805–81), the strategist of armed struggle and 'minority revolution'. Blanqui rejected anarchism, as well as all other theories of his day, as mere *idées fixes*. In his scheme of things, revolutionaries criticized, judged, sentenced, and enforced; they did not present detailed plans for a necessarily unknown future. Nevertheless, Blanqui was also a theorist, whose thinking not only revolved around the notion of revolution, but also around the concept of power: "Three forces dominate and rule society: 1) ideas, 2) capital, 3) weapons.... One can only be master of a society if one possesses all three."<sup>70</sup> The struggle between the rich and the poor, the exploited and the exploiters, could only end in one of these forces destroying the other; for Blanqui, reconciliation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was impossible. Even during his lengthy spells in prison, where he spent half his adult life, Blanqui continued his fight for the liberation of the masses from oppression and exploitation; this earned him the soubriquet "l'Enfermé." He was a key player in the revolutions of 1830, 1848, and 1871. Both in his actions and in his appearance, raddled from his long years in prison, Blanqui embodied the 'spectre of communism' evoked in Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto*. His fight for the cause of the lowest class was rooted in a social philosophy that was no longer utopian (as with the early socialists); neither, however, was it based on a critique of political economy (as with Marx). Blanqui's revolutionary impulses arose directly from the social injustices he witnessed. As a revolutionary and man of action, he personally manned the barricades and wrote a practical *Instruction pour une prise d'armes* (Manual for an Armed Insurrection) (1868), which set out a purely military program and disregarded political and social questions. Notably, however, Blanqui also worked on a theory of revolution.

<sup>70</sup> Manuscript quoted in M. J. Villepontoux and D. Le Nuz, "Révolution et dictature," in *Blanqui et les Blanquistes* (Paris: Sedes, 1986), 129.

Unlike most other revolutionary groups and thinkers of the time, including the labor movement, Blanqui was skeptical about the spontaneous and autonomous uprising of the masses. An insurrection without centralized organization and guidance from professional revolutionaries was, in his view, destined to fail in overcoming the prevailing regime. His organization-theoretical approach was based on his analysis of the defeated spontaneous uprisings, workers' revolts, and strikes of the first half of the nineteenth century. These had taught him that visions of liberty and justice did not realize themselves spontaneously, or overnight. Hence, he counted on a militant elite, who would prepare, organize, and lead the armed revolt. It was precisely this aspect of Blanqui's organizational and revolutionary theory that attracted criticism – a criticism that Rosa Luxemburg, with reference to Blanqui, would, decades later, also level at Lenin.

Blanqui combined his elitist approach with the Enlightenment hope of 'reeducating the masses'. In direct opposition to a clerically administered education, this was to be achieved by means of scientific instruction and atheism, both of which had their mechanical-materialist roots in the French Enlightenment and, incidentally, also reproduced the latter's light imagery (see, for example, the journal *Candide*, which was founded by Blanqui together with Gustave Tridon). With his emphasis on education, Blanqui, somewhat surprisingly, ultimately put his faith in ideas: "No! Not manual skill, but only the idea makes the man. The means of his deliverance are not his arms, but his brain, and the brain only comes alive through instruction. To attack this wet-nurse of thought is an attack on ourselves as thinking beings, a social crime."<sup>71</sup> Unlike the stomach, the brain, according to Blanqui, was perfectly able to tolerate abstinence; indeed, the brain could become so accustomed to lack of mental nourishment that it might eventually dislike or even refuse it to the point of intellectual death. Notably, however, Blanqui qualified his message of the salutary blessings of education by formulating it in the form of a hypothesis, and he was also realistic enough not to specify a time frame for its achievement. "We are thus unable to see clearly in what way the social problem may be solved. Between what is and what ought to be, there is a gap, which is so enormous that it cannot be bridged by reason."<sup>72</sup> Education, however, also had a part to play in the revolutionary struggle. While soldiers marched reluctantly, urged on by force and liquor, the volunteers among the common people would fight with enthusiasm "for an idea.... They have a head as well as a heart. No army in the world measures up to this elite"<sup>73</sup> – or at least no army would if this elite were organized and not so widely dispersed.

<sup>71</sup> Auguste Blanqui, *Le communisme, avenir de la société* (1866), in *Textes choisis*, ed. Vjaceslav Petrovic Volguine (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1955), 170.

<sup>72</sup> Blanqui, *Le communisme*, 169.

<sup>73</sup> Auguste Blanqui, *Instruction pour une prise d'armes* (1868), in *Textes choisis*, 218.

Blanqui's concept of revolution underwent a number of changes over the course of his lifetime and evolved with his practical experiences. Initially, revolution meant revolt, a conception that, in line with Blanqui's own motto that "inactivity is death,"<sup>74</sup> took the active part played by the oppressed into account. Later on, Blanqui increasingly conceived of revolution as a holistic process, of which revolt was only one aspect. Revolt was the moment of destructive violence that was necessary in order to change the status quo. Only destruction would create the empty space in which a new social order could be constructed. The construction phase, however, was just as important to the consolidation process of the revolution. Blanqui's concept of revolution thus contains both a destructive and a constructive element. To him, revolution does not mark a break with history but is rather part of the course of history – a notion well suited to a structuralist concept of revolution that does not culminate in a singularly extraordinary event but rather acknowledges that shorter periods alternate with longer ones and innovations turn into new structures by way of cascading repetitions and returns. Revolution thus conceived can be described as a process of "structural change" (Krzysztof Pomian), while the phenomenon as such, with all its familiar features, continues to act as an indicator of this change: revolution as a political phenomenon is characterized by an offensive, radical, and progressive ideology that looks to the future and aims at the fundamental and irreversible overthrow of the current social order.

Perhaps this is the reason why Blanqui continues to be regarded as revolution's eternal incarnation. From this point of view, his essay *L'éternité par les astres* (Eternity Through the Stars) occupies a place of systematic significance within the body of his work. Within its pages, he introduces the idea of eternal recurrence – ten whole years before Nietzsche and with much less pathos, though all the more disillusioned. If Nietzsche burdened the individual with an ethical imperative, Blanqui's eternal recurrence extended not only to society, but to the entire universe:

"there is no such thing as progress ... it is all just common repeats, redundancies. ... This eternity of man through the stars is a melancholy one, and even sadder is this sequestration of brother-worlds by the unrelenting barrier of space. ... That which we call progress is imprisoned on all earths and will perish with them. ... The universe repeats itself endlessly and fidgets on the spot. Eternity infinitely and imperturbably acts out the same performance."<sup>75</sup>

With these words, the work ends. Blanqui's disillusionment is also noticeable in his revolutionary writings, where he refrains from depicting the new social order

<sup>74</sup> Manuscript quoted in Villepontoux and Le Nuz, "Révolution et dictature," 107.

<sup>75</sup> Auguste Blanqui, *L'éternité par les astres* (Paris: Les impressions nouvelles, 2002), 108–10.

as the automatic result of an uprising. Blanqui himself called his century the century of disillusionment and skepticism. In 1852, he wrote that the history of the 1789 revolution read like a news story of his own day: "Total similarity; the same words, the same locale, the same epithets, the same course of events – an exact copy."<sup>76</sup> This (hi)story, however, had benefited the bourgeoisie to a much greater extent than the proletariat. According to Blanqui, the same 'mystification' was taking place over and over again: representatives of the middle class put themselves at the helm of the workers, led them into battle against the aristocracy and the clergy, seized power, and turned against the people, who lost their bearings "as soon as they saw that their leaders of yesterday had turned into their tormentors of today."<sup>77</sup>

Most of the measures implemented by the Paris Commune went back to Blanqui and his allies, among them the abolition of rack rents, the introduction of secular schooling, the separation of church and state, and the arming of the workers. Blanqui himself was arrested on the eve of the proclamation on July 18, 1871, and he remained under arrest for the duration of the short reign of the Commune. During this period of imprisonment, he wrote *Eternity Through the Stars*, a social phantasmagoria. Strictly speaking, the work is less testimony to Blanqui's resignation than to a sober realism on his part. Here he no longer couples revolutionary commitment with ideas of progress and perfection but rather conceives of revolutionary activity as an eternal task to be tackled afresh at every turn. He who rejects providence embraces recurrence. Thus, toward the end of the nineteenth century, revolution and eternal recurrence converge in a manner strikingly similar to the astronomic phenomenon of *revolutio*. "The century was incapable of responding to the new technological possibilities with a new social order,"<sup>78</sup> as Benjamin noted in his *Arcades Project*. Nevertheless, this century was able to articulate distress and hope, indignation and enthusiasm, in the form of revolutionary ideas and practices. And it was also able to give effective expression to its fears and desires.

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<sup>76</sup> Auguste Blanqui, *Lettre à Maillard*, in *Ceuvres complètes*, vol. 1, *Écrits sur la révolution*, ed. Arno Münster (Paris: Éditions galilée, 1977), 357.

<sup>77</sup> Blanqui, *Lettre à Maillard*.

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 26.

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## VIII

## HISTORY





PHILOSOPHIZING ABOUT HISTORY IN THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY: *ZUSAMMENHANG*  
AND THE “PROGRESSIVE METHOD” IN  
GERMAN HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

LAURENCE DICKEY

Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) and his student, Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936), were both famous in their day for their contributions to what modern social scientists call the “idiographic” method of inquiry, which deals with the description of particulars, in contrast to a “nomothetic” method based on general laws.<sup>1</sup> As key figures in the so-called Southwest German school of neo-Kantian philosophy they developed the idiographic method to distinguish research in the human sciences from that in the natural sciences, the latter of which, they said, was governed by the “nomothetic” method. What is more, in their most famous works – “History and Natural Science” (1894) and *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science* (1902)<sup>2</sup> – Windelband and Rickert, respectively, argued that the idiographic method held out to historians the possibility of providing their disciple with a philosophically informed methodological alternative to the naturalism of positivist historiography, to the apriorism of philosophy of history, and to the mere compilation of facts that had long been associated with antiquarianism. The great German scholar Max Weber (1864–1920) followed Windelband and Rickert in this<sup>3</sup> and, as we shall see shortly, had frequent recourse to their work as he developed his own understanding of method in the social sciences.

<sup>1</sup> Neil Smelser, *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 201–4.

<sup>2</sup> Windelband’s text has been translated by Guy Oakes as “History and Natural Science,” *History and Theory* 19, no. 2 (1980): 169–85. For Rickert, see *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> See the series of remarks in Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, eds. E. A. Shils et al. (New York: Free Press, 1949) [henceforth Weber, MSS], 132–61.

I wish to dedicate this essay to my former colleague and long-term friend Bruce Kuklick, who for many years discussed with me the question of whether historical scholarship is real and vocational or just a social construction that temporarily served the ideological interests of a certain professional group at a particular moment in history.

Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923), another well-known German thinker, also fully appreciated the methodological acumen of Windelband and Rickert. But while discussing their work in his essay “Modern Philosophy of History” (1903),<sup>4</sup> Troeltsch placed them at the end of a nineteenth-century tradition of German thinking about the relationship between philosophy and history. His view was that Windelband and Rickert had translated into philosophical “principles” methodological guidelines that German historians had “instinctively” operated with earlier in the century.<sup>5</sup> As Troeltsch made clear, over the course of the century these historians had used philosophical principles to give methodological rigor and systematic unity to their discipline. According to Troeltsch, therefore, the work of Windelband and Rickert is the culmination of a long German meditation on historical method to which philosophically minded historians (e.g., J. G. Droysen [1808–84]) and historically minded philosophers (e.g., Wilhelm Dilthey [1833–1911]) had contributed. Troeltsch was not unique in this regard, for his teacher, Dilthey, one of the nineteenth century’s most versatile and profound thinkers, had also observed in 1903 that the German historical school, led by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) and Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), had long indulged a bias for philosophical thinking about historical method.<sup>6</sup> So Dilthey, too, saw a connection between the earlier historical and later methodological work of important groups of German thinkers.

Since Friedrich Meinecke (1862–1954) published his great book *Historism* (1936), it has been commonplace to refer to the tradition of which Troeltsch and Dilthey were speaking as that of “German historism.”<sup>7</sup> Setting aside the controversy that has long surrounded the scholarly debate about the difference between historism and historicism, I wish to suggest that the key element in Meinecke’s work is the link he posits between historism and the idea of “historical individuality.”<sup>8</sup> As it turns out, historical individuality is what Windelband and Rickert had maintained would issue forth from historical work that operated with the idiographic method of inquiry.<sup>9</sup> Meinecke followed them in this, arguing that historical individuality was achieved when historians succeeded in relating “isolated” facts to each other and, by so doing, establishing empirically grounded

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, “Modern Philosophy of History,” in *Religion in History*, trans. J. L. Adams et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 309.

<sup>5</sup> Troeltsch, “Modern Philosophy of History,” 309.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Works*, eds. R. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996) [henceforth Dilthey, SW], 4:387–9.

<sup>7</sup> F. Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, trans. J. Anderson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Meinecke makes the point in *Machiavellianism*, trans. D. Scott (New York: Praeger, 1965), 387.

<sup>9</sup> Troeltsch, “Modern Philosophy of History,” 290, makes the point exactly.

connections between facts that the historian could then organize into a context for historical study.<sup>10</sup>

Before Meinecke, however, Windelband and Rickert had developed philosophical arguments for demonstrating the relationship between the “connectedness of facts” and the related ideas of “historical context” and “historical individuality.”<sup>11</sup> According to Rickert, “isolated” or “atomic” facts – what Windelband called “fragmented particulars”<sup>12</sup> – were “unhistorical” while connected facts not only were “historical” but were “unique” or “singular” or “individual.”<sup>13</sup> On the basis of this distinction between isolated and individual facts, Rickert argued that “a coherent entity” (*Zusammengehörigkeit*) was formed in history through the historian’s ability to identify meaningful clusters of connected facts.<sup>14</sup> For him as well as Windelband, moreover, facts that are “coherent” (*zusammengehörig*) formed themselves into a “nexus of facts” (*Zusammenhang der Tatsachen*) that gave “historically defined structure” or “unique temporal definition” to study of the past.<sup>15</sup> The idea of historical individuality follows from this – from what Windelband called the act of “gathering and weaving together” facts so that an empirically grounded “historical *Zusammenhang*” could be studied in all of its historical individuality and particularity.<sup>16</sup>

In light of the connection between the idiographic method and historical individuality and in light of Meinecke’s claim that historicism’s great contribution to historical scholarship is the idea of historical individuality, it would be difficult to deny the all-important connection between historicism and the idiographic method of historical inquiry. Aside from that connection, though, there is a less obvious and less studied connection between the two, one that I wish to make the focus of this chapter.

The connection I have in mind involves examining more closely what we earlier saw Troeltsch suggest was a link between the philosophical principles of the idiographic method and the intuitions nineteenth-century German historians had about how to give, in Dilthey’s words, “systematic coherence” (*Zusammenhang*) to their discipline at a time when history as a discipline was both gaining independent academic status in German universities and trying to establish a professional identity for itself that was neither antiquarian nor philosophy of history.<sup>17</sup> To that end, the aim of this chapter is to show that much that was

<sup>10</sup> Meinecke, *Machiavellianism*, 377, 387.

<sup>11</sup> Rickert, *Limits*, 79–82, 107, 115, 133.

<sup>12</sup> Windelband, “History,” 183.

<sup>13</sup> Rickert, *Limits*, 66–8, 81–2, 107–9, 115.

<sup>14</sup> Rickert, *Limits*, 81–3.

<sup>15</sup> Rickert, *Limits*, 66–7, 81–3; Windelband, “History,” 175–80.

<sup>16</sup> Windelband, “History,” 178, 180, 174.

<sup>17</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:134.

considered philosophically new about the idiographic method at the turn of the twentieth century had its roots in an older German tradition of historical thinking that, following Dilthey, I shall call Humboldtian.<sup>18</sup>

At the core of this tradition is the idea of *Zusammenhang*, a word that in English translation has varied meanings: connection, coherence, nexus, pattern, context, structure, complex, interrelatedness, connectedness, and interconnection. As we saw earlier, Windelband and Rickert made *Zusammenhang* a main focus of the idiographic method – which explains why Rickert dedicated an entire chapter to discussion of “The Historical Nexus” (*Zusammenhang*). And Weber had the idea on his mind when, following Windelband and Rickert, he wrote that historical knowledge begins with the understanding of “historically individual complexes” of “concrete historical interconnections [*Zusammenhänge*].”<sup>19</sup> As we shall see shortly, a group of prominent German thinkers, many of whom were associated with the University of Berlin, wrote histories or tracts about how to write history in which *Zusammenhang* was the guiding methodological idea.

But before Humboldt and his colleagues at Berlin latched on to *Zusammenhang* as a methodological principle, the idea had gained broad prominence among a diverse group of eighteenth-century German thinkers – philosophers, students of aesthetics, and historians (especially at the University of Göttingen).<sup>20</sup> The philosophers G.W. Leibniz (1646–1716) and C. Wolff (1679–1754) had used the word to stress three ideas: “the interconnection of things” (*Zusammenhang der Dinge*), the unity of knowledge, and the necessity of showing how isolated facts “go together” (*zusammengesetzte*).<sup>21</sup> As it happened, Wolff also used *Zusammenhang* to translate the Latin term *nexus*,<sup>22</sup> a word that had among its many meanings the sense of joining and weaving things together. Throughout the eighteenth century, moreover, Wolff’s students in the fields of aesthetics and history used *Zusammenhang* to explain the methodological procedure by which coherent entities (e.g., a “historical *Zusammenhang*”) could be formed by connecting isolated facts and forming

<sup>18</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:134ff. Also see R. Steven Turner, “University Reformers and Professional Scholarship in Germany, 1760–1806,” in *The University in Society*, ed. L. Stone (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 2:525.

<sup>19</sup> Weber, MSS 173, 101, 135.

<sup>20</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:378–85, stresses the Göttingen contribution to the method of *Zusammenhang*.

<sup>21</sup> For Leibniz and Wolff, see Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); and Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). My former colleague David Sorkin alerted me to Wolff’s extensive use of *Zusammenhang* as a philosophical principle. He directed me, for example, to Wolff’s “Deutsche Metaphysik” (1720), in which sections 51–68 and 368–71 deal extensively with what Wolff called “the art of structuring” (*Art der Zusammensetzung*). This work appears in C. Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. H. W. Arndt et al. (New York: Olms, 1983) [henceforth Wolff GW], 2/1.

<sup>22</sup> Wolff GW, 2/1:677.

contexts for historical study with them.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, key German figures from the Göttingen historian A. L. Schlözer (1735–1809) to Droysen and Dilthey had recognized – as sixteenth-century thinkers (e.g., F. Baudouin and J. Bodin) before them had – that the idea of “weaving things together” to form “organic” wholes had antecedents in the ancient world – in the philosophy of Plato and in the so-called universal history written by Polybius (200–118 BC).<sup>24</sup>

In Plato, the word for “weaving and plaiting together” different things is *sympleke*, a term Plato used to talk about the internal coherence of language and of literary works more generally.<sup>25</sup> (It is hardly insignificant that F. Schleiermacher [1768–1834], in his great translations of Plato’s works, translated *sympleke* with *Zusammenhang*.) For his part, Polybius used *sympleke* in the opening pages of his *Histories* to explain the overall aim of what he called “pragmatic history.”<sup>26</sup> What was that aim: to weave things together in “organic wholes.” Again, it is not an accident that German historians from Schlözer to Droysen and Dilthey traced the origin of the idea of *Zusammenhang* and of philosophically informed history back to Polybius.

At any rate, there can be little doubt either about the centrality of the method of *Zusammenhang* in the emergence of the historical discipline in the nineteenth century or about its importance to the work of Windelband and Rickert. But in order to explain the complexities of the *Zusammenhang* tradition of thinking about history and method more fully, I wish in what follows to examine the particulars of the tradition more closely.

#### ZUSAMMENHANG AND THE HUMBOLDTIAN TRADITION OF HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, historically minded German thinkers were on the verge of making *Zusammenhang* a central methodological concern of historical inquiry. In addition to what Wolffians among the historians at the University of Göttingen did with the idea of *Zusammenhang*, Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), then something of a historian himself, showcased the idea in his inaugural address at the University of Jena in 1789. In this address, entitled “The

<sup>23</sup> Between them, M. H. Abrams, *Doing Things with Texts* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 159–87, and David Sorkin, “Reclaiming Theology for the Enlightenment: The Case of S. J. Baumgarten,” *Central European History* 36, no. 4 (2004): 503–30, show how Wolffians used the term “nexus” (*Zusammenhang*) in aesthetics and history. Abrams is especially good on showing how, while *Zusammenhang* in aesthetics produces a “poetic” view of truth, in history it was meant to produce a “scientific” one.

<sup>24</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:327ff.

<sup>25</sup> See the famous lexicon of Liddell and Scott.

<sup>26</sup> See F. W. Walbank, “*Sympleke*: Its Role in Polybius’ *Histories*,” *Yale Classical Studies* 24 (1975): 197–212.

Nature and Value of Universal History,”<sup>27</sup> Schiller urged historians to be more than antiquarians – more than “bread-and-butter” scholars who collected isolated facts and presented them to the public in “fragmentary” form.<sup>28</sup> *Zusammenhang*, the notion, Schiller said, that “everything is connected,” permits historians to aspire to become “philosophical” and to produce general rather than particular knowledge of the past.<sup>29</sup> In a particularly telling formulation of the matter, Schiller claims that “our world-history would become nothing but an aggregate of fragments and be unworthy to be called a science [*Wissenschaft*]” if it were left in the hands of unphilosophical antiquarians.<sup>30</sup> Continuing the thought, he says that “philosophical understanding,” in the form of Kant’s philosophy, has recently come to history’s “aid” by showing historians how to join fragments together and by teaching them how to transform aggregations of facts into a “system,” into a “rationally coherent whole [*zusammenhängenden Ganzen*].”<sup>31</sup> In using “aggregation” and “system” as a word pair – a pair that can be found in Leibniz, Wolff, Kant, and Schlözer – Schiller maps onto the landscape of historical method philosophical terms that encourage historians to embrace what Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) has called the “rationalistic postulate,” whereby all knowledge is held to be “connected.”<sup>32</sup> Insofar as Schiller presents history as the study of the “interconnection of things” (*Zusammenhang der Dinge*), he sets the stage for what Humboldt would soon institutionalize at the University of Berlin.<sup>33</sup>

After the general European upheaval of the 1790s, key German figures, especially in Prussia, called for a renewal of war-weary German culture and for a sustained commitment from government to ground the renewal effort in institutions of higher learning. In Prussia, the founding of the University of Berlin in 1809–10 served both purposes. As is well known, Humboldt had been instrumental in preparing the way for the founding of the university, and, as head of Prussia’s Ministry of the Interior, he played crucial roles in devising a pedagogic mission statement for the university, in recruiting and screening prospective faculty, and

<sup>27</sup> A translation of Schiller’s address can be found in *History and Theory* 11, no. 3 (1972): 321–34.

<sup>28</sup> Schiller, “The Nature and Value of Universal History,” 323.

<sup>29</sup> Schiller, “The Nature and Value of Universal History,” 324. Although I cannot elaborate here, the issue that Aristotle raised about the knowledge produced by history on the one side and poetry and philosophy on the other begins to become problematic when the Germans use philosophy to help historians create general rather than particular knowledge. Humboldt and Ranke are often misunderstood because of a (postmodern?) bias against historians’ having the capacity as historians to produce general knowledge without engaging in a literary process whereby imagination is used, in Humboldt’s and Droysen’s words, to “fill in” gaps between seemingly disconnected facts.

<sup>30</sup> Schiller, “The Nature and Value of Universal History,” 331.

<sup>31</sup> Schiller, “The Nature and Value of Universal History,” 331.

<sup>32</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. F. C. A. Koelln (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 8–9, 15, 22–3, especially at 22.

<sup>33</sup> Schiller, “The Nature and Value of Universal History,” 323.

in organizing the faculties themselves.<sup>34</sup> From his writings of 1809–10, we learn that the curriculum of the new university was designed to promote the general Kantian idea of the unity and connectedness of knowledge, not just in the natural sciences but in the human sciences as well.<sup>35</sup> To give momentum to this pedagogic project – one that Germans at the time often called “neohumanist” – Humboldt invited scholars from all over Germany to join the Berlin faculty and become participants in the ambitious Prussian educational project.

Looking back to the time of the founding of the University of Berlin and fully aware of the university’s importance to the emergence of history as a modern academic discipline, Droysen and Dilthey identified Humboldt as one of the main forces behind both developments. Moreover, and for our purposes here, it was significant that both thinkers called Humboldt “a Bacon for the historical sciences.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, according to Droysen, just as Bacon had established methodological guidelines for the natural sciences, so, too, had Humboldt taught historians, especially in his 1822 essay “On the Historian’s Task,” to realize that there is “connectedness” (*Zusammenhang*) in human history as well as in nature.<sup>37</sup> Droysen and Dilthey were drawn to Humboldt’s conception of connectedness for another reason as well, for it helped them explain the methodological differences between the natural and human sciences. And since Droysen and Dilthey from the 1860s on dedicated themselves to differentiating the two methods and to showing how the methodological idea of *Zusammenhang* gave the human and historical sciences disciplinary autonomy versus the natural sciences, they very much wished to enlist Humboldt in their cause. Or, to put it the other way around, they were pleased to be the heirs of what Dilthey referred to as the Humboldtian tradition of historical scholarship.<sup>38</sup>

It was easy enough to do this, for Droysen and Dilthey, two of Germany’s greatest historians, regarded *Zusammenhang* as a methodological principle around which historical inquiry should be organized. Furthermore, there is evidence from Humboldt’s life in the 1780s and 1790s that he had devoted much attention to thinking about history (and language) in terms of the *Zusammenhang* idea. Perhaps his studies at Göttingen in 1788–9, where *Zusammenhang* had achieved

<sup>34</sup> On Humboldt’s life and career, see Paul Sweet, *Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978–80).

<sup>35</sup> See Rüdiger vom Bruch, *German Universities Past and Future*, ed. M. G. Ash (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn, 1997), 8. The writings are commonly referred to as the memorandum of 1809–10. A translation can be found in *Minerva* 8 (1970): 242–51. There Humboldt stresses “collaboration” (*Zusammenwirken*) in scholarship (243) and peer review of research (248).

<sup>36</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:261–7; Droysen, *Historik*, ed. P. Leyh (Stuttgart: Frommann & Holzboog, 1977), 419.

<sup>37</sup> Droysen, *Historik*, 418–19.

<sup>38</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:118ff., 129ff., 134ff.



institutional credibility through the work of Schlözer,<sup>39</sup> inclined him in this direction, for shortly after exiting the university, and while still in his twenties, Humboldt began to develop a program of study for ancient history in which *Zusammenhang* held out the methodological possibility of grasping “all aspects of [the past in its] connectedness” (*Zusammenhang*).<sup>40</sup> Humboldt communicated this idea to his soon-to-become-famous contemporary F. A. Wolf (1759–1824) in an essay that he sent to him early in 1793. Although Wolf had already committed himself to studying history as an “organic” and “connected whole,”<sup>41</sup> he admitted some years later that Humboldt’s essay had strengthened his resolve to carry out such an undertaking.<sup>42</sup> Thus, at the time of the founding in Berlin, when Humboldt and Wolf were working together on educational policy for the university, both thinkers had made connectedness qua the unity of knowledge a presupposition of historical inquiry.<sup>43</sup>

Although it is not possible to pinpoint the moment when *Zusammenhang* moved to the forefront of the methodological debate in Berlin, there is one occasion that stands out. It occurred in the Preface B. G. Niebuhr (1776–1831) wrote for his monumentally important *History of Rome*, the first volume of which was published in 1811.<sup>44</sup> The *History*, a book G. P. Gooch argued was shaped by Wolf’s thinking on historical method,<sup>45</sup> grew out of lectures Niebuhr began giving in Berlin in late 1810. In the opening pages he explains his approach to history. To begin with, he says, history had to be critical and for two reasons: (1) to establish the integrity of facts and (2) to eliminate “fiction and fable” (*Gedicht and Fabel*) from our understanding of the past.<sup>46</sup> Next, Niebuhr pleads with historians not to be satisfied – as antiquarians had long been satisfied – with the “collection” of “lifeless” and “truncated fragments” of information about past history.<sup>47</sup> Something more “positive,”<sup>48</sup> he claimed, needed to be done with facts

<sup>39</sup> The key document here is Schlözer’s essay of 1772: *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie*. Also see his “On Historiography” (1783), translated in *History and Theory* 18, no. 1 (1979): 37–51.

<sup>40</sup> A key document in this regard is a 1793 essay entitled “Über das Studium des Altertums,” in Humboldt’s *Werke*, eds. A. Flitner et al. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1961), 2:1–24, especially at 2.

<sup>41</sup> See F. A. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer 1795*, ed. and trans. A. Grafton et al. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 147–8.

<sup>42</sup> F. A. Wolf, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. G. Bernhardt (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1869), 884–5.

<sup>43</sup> In SW 3:217, Dilthey specifies that it is “through the unity of consciousness” that we are able to “apprehend the connectedness of a nexus [*Zusammenhang*].” Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 126–45, explains why “connectedness” is a “pre-supposition” of historical inquiry.

<sup>44</sup> See Niebuhr’s Preface, translated in *The Varieties of History: from Voltaire to the Present*, ed. Fritz Richard Stern (New York: Vintage, 1973) [henceforth VH], 46–54.

<sup>45</sup> G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, 1952), 18–19.

<sup>46</sup> VH 48–9.

<sup>47</sup> VH 48.

<sup>48</sup> VH 48.

once they had been collected, criticized, and verified. For Niebuhr, that meant both striving to discover “the general connectedness [*Zusammenhang*] of events” and trying to use such connections to reveal the “meaning and structure” (*Sinn und Zusammenhang*) of history as a “whole.”<sup>49</sup> Finally, and this is decisive for the Humboldtian tradition of scholarship, Niebuhr claimed that a particular work of history would “only be accepted as historical if it already had once been generally accepted and confirmed by the common persuasion of many scholars.”<sup>50</sup> In this, Niebuhr joined with J. S. Semler (1725–91), Wolf and Humboldt before him, and Schleiermacher, August Boeckh (1785–1867), K. O. Müller (1797–1840), Ranke, Dilthey, and Weber after him in assigning historiography qua the peer review of scholarship a pivotal role in the methodological process whereby the findings of any particular historical work can be said, in Boeckh’s words, to “approximate” reality.<sup>51</sup>

Given the dovetailing of methodological convictions among some of Berlin’s most illustrious thinkers, it is much easier to appreciate why *Zusammenhang* is so conspicuous in Humboldt’s 1822 essay on historical method.<sup>52</sup> He begins the essay by announcing his conviction that the “historian’s task” is to “represent” what “actually happened” in the past.<sup>53</sup> He then elaborates, explaining first of all what history is not. To that end, he says that history is not achieved by reproducing reality as a manifold – in all its “serried turmoil.”<sup>54</sup> Such a reality, he suggests, would strike us as “scattered” and “disjointed.”<sup>55</sup> By presenting the past in the form of “isolated” fragments, he continues, history would be little more than a “patchwork,” registering the surface “confusion” of the past rather than the hidden “coherence of all things” (*Zusammenhang der Dinge*) that lies beneath the surface of history.<sup>56</sup> Doing history in the latter sense, he goes on to insist, involves giving “unity” to what in its outward form seems chaotic: that is, it involves working “the collected fragments into a whole” so that “the inner causal nexus” (*innen sachlichen Zusammenhang*) that connects these fragments “gradually becomes visible.”<sup>57</sup> To firm up this point, Humboldt simply states that, while gathering facts and information is the “necessary basis of history,” it is “not history

<sup>49</sup> VH 48.

<sup>50</sup> VH 48.

<sup>51</sup> A. Boeckh, *Encyclopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften*, ed. E. Bratuscheck (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877), 86, 178.

<sup>52</sup> A translation of Humboldt’s “On the Historian’s Task” can be found in *History and Theory* 6 (1967): 57–71. Page references refer to this translation.

<sup>53</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 57.

<sup>54</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 60.

<sup>55</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 57.

<sup>56</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 57–9, 69.

<sup>57</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58, 68.

itself.”<sup>58</sup> Why? Because as the opening and close of Humboldt’s essay reveal, real history involves plunging “deeply” into the truth of history’s “inner causal nexus” and, thereby, gaining access to a general picture “of the form of the connection of all events” (*die Form des Zusammenhanges aller Begebenheiten*).

Here, like Schiller and Niebuhr before him, Humboldt is distancing himself from the conception of the historian as antiquarian – which means he is anything but a “naïve realist” who approaches the past with a copy theory of reality in mind. However, he does not separate himself from antiquarianism simply by dismissing antiquarians as unimaginative pedants. Rather, he pays them a compliment, suggesting that, when historians are confronted with the choice – the false choice of Aristotle – between the particular knowledge of history and the general knowledge of poetry, they have good reason to cling – as the antiquarian surely did – to the facts, for to do otherwise exposed history to the “danger” of succumbing to poetic fantasy.<sup>59</sup> At several places in the “Task” essay, Humboldt specified how exercise of the poetic imagination gives standing to “what does not have existence” in the facts.<sup>60</sup> Similar “alien additions” to reality were read into history by philosophers of history who drew upon a priori values and imposed those values on history.<sup>61</sup> Throughout his essay, therefore, Humboldt displays an admiration for how antiquarians managed to restrict history to “telling what actually happened” and for how they resisted the temptation to “attribute to reality arbitrarily created ideas of [their] own.”<sup>62</sup>

Despite his strictures against the use of the poetic imagination in history, Humboldt required historians<sup>63</sup> to become “active, even creative,” when they gave “shape” and “unity” to “isolated” fragments of history by forming them into coherent wholes (i.e., into a context as a historical *Zusammenhang*). However, through what he called their own “connective abilities”<sup>64</sup> and use of “imagination” historians try to “reveal the truth of an event” – put it into “its proper perspective” – by “connecting the disjointed fragments” that constitute the “raw material” of history.<sup>65</sup> By admitting this, of course, Humboldt seems to concede a similarity between the poet and the historian when it comes to transforming “fragments into a whole”<sup>66</sup> and producing general knowledge. But

<sup>58</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58, 64–5. Since J. M. Chladenius (1710–59), Germans had distinguished between *Geschichte* and *Historie*. According to Chladenius, the former becomes the latter when *Zusammenhang* begins to operate as a methodological principle. Humboldt probably has this distinction in mind here.

<sup>59</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58.

<sup>60</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58–9.

<sup>61</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 64.

<sup>62</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 71.

<sup>63</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 65.

<sup>64</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58–9.

<sup>65</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58.

<sup>66</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58.

he addresses the issue straight on, stating that the demand for coherence, to paraphrase Kant, Schiller, and Boeckh, is a basic and rational human disposition and not just an inclination reserved for poets. Rather, as Kant and Schiller had demonstrated, and as Windelband, B. Croce, and C. Collingwood would later argue, imagination and interpolation were integral to the exercise of human intelligence in all of its applications, especially in its synthetic endeavors. Consequently, when historians strive to weave and join things together in their work they are not, Humboldt insists, secretly performing a poetic act. This is why Humboldt's essay ends<sup>67</sup> with the statement that, because "no [historical] event is separated completely from the general nexus [*allgemeinen Zusammenhange*] of things," the task of the historian is to "search for the coherent pattern of the whole" (*Zusammenhanges des Ganzen*).

Given the possibility that historians could think synthetically about the past without having to sacrifice their credentials as historians, Humboldt proceeds to argue that the standards of coherence operate "differently" in history and poetry.<sup>68</sup> In a strikingly clear formulation, which contests Aristotle's longstanding and authoritative understanding of the relationship between history and poetry, Humboldt explains the difference between the historical and poetic imaginations, implying that, while the latter operates in the realm of "pure fantasy" (*reine Phantasie*), the former subordinates itself to "experience and the investigation of reality."<sup>69</sup>

With this distinction at hand, Humboldt clears the path for the use of imagination in historical inquiry without having to concede that when historians use their imaginations to link facts together and construct contexts in the past they are performing a poetic function and creating a literary construction not discovering a historical *Zusammenhang*. Thus, when Humboldt urges historians to steer what he calls a methodological "middle path"<sup>70</sup> between "the realm of pure ideas" (poetry and philosophy of history) and the realm of disconnected facts (i.e., antiquarianism), and when he distinguishes between coherence (*Zusammenhang*) that is "projected into history" and coherence that is "the essence of history itself,"<sup>71</sup> he means to suggest that historical *Zusammenhang* is the active result of "events themselves" and not of "arbitrarily created ideas."<sup>72</sup>

To ensure that historical scholarship remains on this middle path, Humboldt sets "fusion" (*assimilation*) of "two methods" as the end of historical inquiry: the method of "exact, impartial critical investigation of events" and the method

<sup>67</sup> Humboldt, "Task," 71.

<sup>68</sup> Humboldt, "Task," 58.

<sup>69</sup> Humboldt, "Task," 58.

<sup>70</sup> Humboldt, "Task," 61.

<sup>71</sup> Humboldt, "Task," 65.

<sup>72</sup> Humboldt, "Task," 65, 71.

whereby facts and events are connected.<sup>73</sup> He grants, moreover, that the latter method involves the “connective abilities” of historians,<sup>74</sup> abilities that are on full display in the process of the “filling in” of connections between isolated facts.<sup>75</sup> But as he insists throughout the “Task” essay, the historical and poetic arts differ because whereas the former disciplines imagination by subordinating it to “reality,” the latter all too frequently allows the imagination to “swing free of all reality” by imposing fanciful “poetic additions” on it.<sup>76</sup> Needless to say, for Humboldt, historical knowledge falls under the auspices of the former not the latter.

BETWEEN A PRIORI AND ANTIQUARIAN KNOWLEDGE  
OF THE PAST: RANKE AND THE “PROGRESSIVE METHOD”  
OF HISTORICAL INQUIRY

The method Humboldt recommends to historians for determining “what actually happened” in the past had enormous influence on historically minded thinkers in and around the University of Berlin in the 1820s and 1830s. And, as Felix Gilbert has told us, Humboldt’s influence coincided with the movement toward the “professionalization of history” that was under way at Berlin during these years<sup>77</sup> – through Humboldt’s, Niebuhr’s, and Boeckh’s teachings on the method of *Zusammenhang* and as a consequence of Ranke’s arrival in Berlin in 1825. It was this period, moreover, that Dilthey singled out in 1903 as especially important for the development of historical thinking in nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>78</sup> Why? Because as Dilthey comments, it was what his own teachers at Berlin – Boeckh, Trendelenburg, and Ranke – had taught him about how the idea of “connectedness” (*Zusammenhang*) had originated in the thinking of Humboldt and Niebuhr. More recently, Cassirer has made the same point, noting how Niebuhr’s and Humboldt’s methodological concerns intersected in Ranke.<sup>79</sup> And it is Ranke, whom Lord Acton called the “Columbus” of modern history, to whom we now need to look in order to probe more deeply into the relationship between *Zusammenhang* and the German tendency to philosophize about history in the nineteenth century.

<sup>73</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 59.

<sup>74</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58–9.

<sup>75</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 58.

<sup>76</sup> Humboldt, “Task,” 59–64.

<sup>77</sup> Felix Gilbert, “The Professionalization of History in the Nineteenth Century,” in *History*, ed. John Higham (Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

<sup>78</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:387–9.

<sup>79</sup> Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science, and History after Hegel*, trans. Charles Hendel et al. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950), 238–41.

Although there is evidence from the mid-1810s that Ranke had been thinking about *Zusammenhang* while a student in Leipzig, it is the Preface to his first major historical work, *Histories of Latin and Germanic Nations from 1495–1514* (1824), that permits us to gauge his commitment to *Zusammenhang* as a method of inquiry.<sup>80</sup> That many scholars have misunderstood what Ranke is saying about method in this Preface goes far to explain why the nineteenth-century German effort to philosophize about history has not been fully appreciated by modern scholarship.

The Preface announces Ranke's intention to put the particular histories of Italy and several Germanic nations around 1500 into an interpretive framework that stresses the "unity" created by each nation's participation in a "common enterprise" and a common historical experience: that of the beginning of the "great schism brought about [in Europe] by the Reformation."<sup>81</sup> He then argues – in Polybian fashion – that viewing particular histories as part of a larger "related" (*zusammenhängenden*) history gives us a "comprehensive historical view" of the "unity" of an individually important historical event.<sup>82</sup> With this methodological consideration in mind, Ranke clarifies what he means, writing that, although his aim includes "the supreme [historical] law" of getting the facts right, his larger purpose has less to do with identifying "disconnected" facts than with preparing "an exposition of the unity ... of events" to which those facts belong and/or can be related.<sup>83</sup>

In this context, Ranke writes some very famous words, declaring that his book "wants only to show what actually happened" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*) in the past.<sup>84</sup> Clearly, this statement cannot be interpreted as registering Ranke's satisfaction with compiling, criticizing, and verifying facts for their own sake.<sup>85</sup> After all, he has just explained that the ultimate aim of his work is to find "connectedness/relatedness" in history and in the form of historical individuality. Moreover, over the course of his illustrious career he repeatedly reiterated his commitment to *Zusammenhang* as a strategy for doing history. Here are some examples.

First, in a diverse group of writings from the 1830s Ranke dwells on the role connectedness plays both in penetrating to the *Causalnexus* of facts and in

<sup>80</sup> I follow the translation in VH 55–8.

<sup>81</sup> VH 56.

<sup>82</sup> VH 56–7.

<sup>83</sup> VH 57.

<sup>84</sup> VH 57.

<sup>85</sup> George Iggers, "Historicism," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. P. Wiener (New York: Scribner, 1973), and Leonard Krieger, "Elements of Early Historicism," *History and Theory* Beiheft 14 (1975): 7–14, both understand very well that this phrase has been misunderstood by many commentators on Ranke.

comprehending the unity of seemingly unconnected events.<sup>86</sup> His main claim<sup>87</sup> in this regard is that historians “who consider [history as] simply an immense aggregate of particular facts” have failed to realize that real history – history that lifts “itself in its own fashion from the investigation and observation of particulars to a universal view of events” – produces “knowledge of objectively existing relatedness” (*objektiv vorhandenen Zusammenhang*). Second, in the 1860s Ranke continues thinking about the past in terms of *Zusammenhang*, arguing<sup>88</sup> that criticism and “synthetic construction” give us an understanding of how facts and events can be approached in terms of their “general connectedness” (*allgemeinen Zusammenhanges*). A third and final example of Ranke’s lifelong commitment to *Zusammenhang* is evident in the Preface to his *Universal History* (1880). There, echoing Polybius again, he states that “a collection of national histories ... is not what is meant by Universal History, for in such a work the general connection of things [*Zusammenhang der Dinge*] is liable to be obscured. To recognize this connection [*Zusammenhang*] is the task” of scientific history.<sup>89</sup> Or again from the same Preface: “nations can be regarded in no other connection [*Zusammenhang*] than in that of [their] mutual action and reaction.”<sup>90</sup>

In the face of these examples, which can easily be multiplied, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Niebuhr’s and Humboldt’s conception of *Zusammenhang* profoundly shaped Ranke’s thinking about historical inquiry. And, like Humboldt, Ranke struggled his entire life to keep history separate not only from antiquarianism but also from poetry and philosophy of history. It is not that Ranke disdained either poetry or philosophy, for in the 1830s he proclaimed that his own work had been informed by “a spirit of philosophy” and by an appreciation of synthesis as the essence of “poetic power.”<sup>91</sup> But like Droysen and Dilthey, he distanced himself from philosophy of history because, like poetry, it operated with a priori principles and “abstract definitions” that, in his words, allowed one to heap “particulars upon particulars” and then claim that the particulars were held together by “some general [preconceived or arbitrary] principle.”<sup>92</sup> Citing Fichte and Hegel as examples of philosophers of history, Ranke inveighed against the two, noting that they sought “to prove their abstract principle[s]” by imposing them on “concrete” facts.<sup>93</sup> Not for nothing did Adolf Harnack (1851–1930),

<sup>86</sup> Leopold von Ranke in *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. George Iggers (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973) [henceforth TPH], 40.

<sup>87</sup> VH 59.

<sup>88</sup> VH 62.

<sup>89</sup> TPH 162.

<sup>90</sup> TPH 162.

<sup>91</sup> THP 34–5, 44.

<sup>92</sup> VH 59; TPH 34–5.

<sup>93</sup> THP 49.

another great German historian, credit Ranke with having led the way in “emancipating” history from a priori “philosophical systems.”<sup>94</sup>

By placing his methodological convictions somewhere between antiquarianism and apriorism Ranke remained true to the Humboldtian “middle path” approach to historical study.<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, anyone who investigates Ranke’s thinking cannot be surprised to find him constantly making the case for emancipating history from the one and the other. On this point, Ranke himself is most helpful, for he devotes much attention to explaining how the middle path approach would ensure the methodological autonomy of the emerging historical discipline. For example, on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday, Ranke recalls a youthful experience that inclined him to the middle path strategy for doing history.<sup>96</sup> What he recounts is the dismay he experienced when as a youth he discovered that Walter Scott’s *Quentin Durward* was more “fiction” (*Erdichtete*) than “fact.” Shocked by Scott’s contrivances as well as by his own gullibility, Ranke remembers vowing to resist “adding [unhistorical] traits” to history for the sake of entertainment or dramatic effect.<sup>97</sup> So, in 1824, in the Preface to his *Histories*, he reminds his readers that “history cannot be expected to possess the same free development of its subject” that is so prevalent in “poetic work.”<sup>98</sup> By the 1830s, he is using similar reasoning to distance himself from other forms of apriorism, especially philosophy of history.<sup>99</sup> And while he may not always have lived up to this expectation himself, Ranke does criticize European historians who, since 1815, had written “party” histories favoring either the party of “movement” or the party of “resistance.”<sup>100</sup>

More importantly, Ranke’s writings from the 1830s to the 1860s reveal how he proposed to differentiate historical knowledge from philosophy of history.<sup>101</sup> He develops this argument in two ways. First, while readily conceding that knowledge of the past can “never possess the unity of a philosophical system,” he does claim that historians can produce knowledge that has “coherence [*Zusammenhang*] of its own.”<sup>102</sup> In a pointed formulation, he writes that “history is distinguished from

<sup>94</sup> Harnack, *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at its Height*, ed. M. Rumscheidt (London: Collins, 1989), 185.

<sup>95</sup> Cassirer, *Problem of Knowledge*, 230–42, is excellent on the middle path in Ranke as well as Humboldt.

<sup>96</sup> H. Holborn, *History and the Humanities* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), 189–90, discusses the birthday address.

<sup>97</sup> In his day, Polybius was famous for resisting the tendency to “sensationalize” history via poetic and/or rhetorical means. Humboldt and Ranke join him in this.

<sup>98</sup> VH 57.

<sup>99</sup> VH 58–9; TPH 35–6.

<sup>100</sup> TPH 42–3.

<sup>101</sup> TPH 34–6.

<sup>102</sup> VH 60.



poetry and philosophy ... by its given subject matter, which [means history] ... is subject to empiricism. [As such, history] brings [philosophy and empiricism] together in a third element peculiar to itself. History is neither the one nor the other, but demands a union of the [two], under the condition that [the study] ... be directed from the ideal to the real."<sup>103</sup> For Ranke, of course, being directed toward the real entails a bias toward facts, a bias that protects historians from subordinating historical "events" to their own "ideas."<sup>104</sup> And by orienting themselves to "concrete" rather than "abstract" things historians may be able to probe the *Causalnexus* that lies at the "inner connection" of things without indulging in poetic "fancy" or philosophical "speculation."<sup>105</sup>

The second argument Ranke uses to explain how history and philosophy differ turns on his answer to the question of whether history is a science or an art.<sup>106</sup> Along with Humboldt, Ranke held that historians must "work in two directions" at once.<sup>107</sup> On the one hand, they are artists relative to antiquarians; on the other hand, they are scientists relative to apriorists. In the mode of artist, historians engage in the art of synthesis, structuring facts into the connectedness of an organic whole. In the mode of scientist, these same historians ground ideas of unity, connectedness, and coherence in particular clusters of facts. In theory, Ranke says, the methods employed by artist and scientist should "coincide," with the result that history would "mirror" reality.<sup>108</sup> But Ranke followed many of his predecessors (e.g., J. M. Chladenius [1710–59]) in recognizing the subjective aspect of any historical work. Thus, instead of demanding that historical work mirror a real historical *Zusammenhang*, Ranke simply argues – as Niebuhr earlier had – that connectedness is built up over time through the cooperation of scholars, with the result that historiography as the collective intelligence of professional historians arrives "step-by-step" at "approximate" knowledge of reality.<sup>109</sup> In this, Ranke articulates what his famous contemporary K. O. Müller had said in 1825 in his own great work of history: that historical knowledge not only was approximate but also the consequence of historians' working together to gather information gradually and to connect it via what he called the "progressive method" of scholarly inquiry.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>103</sup> TPH 33–4.

<sup>104</sup> TPH 36.

<sup>105</sup> TPH 29–40.

<sup>106</sup> TPH 33–4. Ranke, in *The Secret of World History*, ed. R. Wines (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), 258.

<sup>107</sup> VH 62.

<sup>108</sup> TPH 44, 50.

<sup>109</sup> TPH 44.

<sup>110</sup> K. O. Müller, *Introduction to a Scientific System of Mythology*, trans. J. Leitch (London: Longman, 1844), 8.

DILTHEY AND *ZUSAMMENHANG*: THE “COMPOSITE  
[METHODOLOGICAL] PROCEDURE”

In the 1860s, while still in his twenties, Dilthey attended Droysen's lectures on historical method at the University of Berlin. There, the young Dilthey learned, in his words, “how very different the conditions of successful practice are for the historian and for a physicist.”<sup>111</sup> At the same time, he learned from Droysen how to differentiate between the methods of the human and natural sciences. Above all, however, Dilthey learned three basic things from Droysen (as well as from his other teachers): that the historical method had to develop rules and control for the “subjective grasp of [historical] events,” that the constructive imagination was an essential tool for linking isolated facts together, and that the past had to be investigated according to its “historical connection” (*historischer Zusammenhang*).<sup>112</sup>

Given his early assimilation of Droysen's teachings on method, it is not surprising to discover Dilthey's resorting time and again to the idea of *Zusammenhang* to explain his own methodological preferences and to show how *Zusammenhang* became a guiding principle in the historical and human sciences more generally. For instance, he argued that historical knowledge begins with the understanding of “connectedness in history” or with the historian's “sense” of how things in the past are both “woven” together and “structurally linked” to form “the nexus” (*Zusammenhang*) of the “representational world” we call history.<sup>113</sup>

More specifically, his view was that history exhibits at certain times and places points of “intersection” in which “the relations between parts of the ... [larger] whole” (*Zusammenhang der Teile des Ganzen*) are organically revealed as a “nexus [*Zusammenhang*] in which the parts are interconnected.”<sup>114</sup> Historical knowledge, therefore, derives from historians' consciously grasping what “is the decisive thing” — “the nexus” of what happened in the past.<sup>115</sup> But since this knowledge is inseparable from time, it necessarily involves a community of scholars working over time to develop an “ever” deepening and expanding sense of the “complexities” and “levels of connection” (*Zusammenhang*) that compose a specific historical “context.”<sup>116</sup> And that is why Dilthey<sup>117</sup> bases his thinking about method

<sup>111</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:268.

<sup>112</sup> These themes are discussed in Droysen, *Historik*, 483–8.

<sup>113</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:327, 160, 141.

<sup>114</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:156, 176, 206, 219, 276.

<sup>115</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:327.

<sup>116</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:213, 165, 367; cf. 217, 273, 276, 327.

<sup>117</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:166.

on the principle that the first task of the historian is to develop “insights” into “historical nexus” (*historischen Zusammenhang*).<sup>118</sup>

Dilthey reinforces his commitment to *Zusammenhang* by dwelling in many of his works on the role it played in the long-term development of historical thinking in the West. So, for example, he commends Polybius for showing historians how particular fragments of information can be “woven” together to form coherent historical wholes.<sup>119</sup> In the same vein, he notes how certain sixteenth-century humanists, experiencing what a modern scholar has termed their own “neo-Polybian” moment,<sup>120</sup> referred to Polybius while developing their own view of historical connectedness.<sup>121</sup> And just after saying that these Renaissance thinkers learned the art of “weaving things together” from Polybius,<sup>122</sup> he talked about their grasp of history’s “systematic connections” (*systematischer Zusammenhänge*). Carrying his historical reflection forward, Dilthey singled out the historians at Göttingen and Berlin for giving history a “scholarly, coherent and systematic” methodological orientation,<sup>123</sup> one that enabled them “to link sources”; to make “historical connections”; and to synthesize the “various connections of causes and effects” (*Wirkungszusammenhänge*) in a “historical whole” (*geschichtlichen Zusammenhanges*). It is telling that Dilthey sees a potential for “mastering” history in this method and contrasts it with the mere “compilation” of facts.<sup>124</sup>

And yet, Dilthey’s lifelong concern was to protect history from “philosophers of history.”<sup>125</sup> What alarmed him about such philosophers was that rather than approach history with a “philosophical bent,” they imposed a priori values on history while often trying to conceal their own agendas.<sup>126</sup> The result: particulars of the past were grouped together in “arbitrary” ways that created a false sense of unity about what actually happened in the past.<sup>127</sup> Or, as he once put it, the a priori approach “destroys the nexus [*Zusammenhang*] of ... the actual historical past” and “substitutes for it a fictitious and abstract connection [*Zusammenhang*].”<sup>128</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Dilthey’s notion of “insight” is unrelentingly collective. It is, he says (SW 3:166, 183, 327), the scholarly result of learning through the work of others. It is, therefore, decidedly “discursive” (i.e., what Dilthey called “a reflective awareness of reality” [Dilthey, SW 3:239]).

<sup>119</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:165, 176, 184–5; 4:222, 327–30.

<sup>120</sup> The idea of a Polybian moment in Renaissance thinking has been stressed by Donald Kelley, “*Historia Integra*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25 (1964): 38, 47. Also very helpful on Polybius in the sixteenth century is B. Reynolds, “Shifting Currents in Historical Criticism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14, no. 4 (1953): 471–92. Both explain how Renaissance thinkers used Polybius as a corrective to rhetorical and poetic forms of history.

<sup>121</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:165, 185; 4:333–4.

<sup>122</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:333ff.; 3:165–6.

<sup>123</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:174–8; 4:375–88.

<sup>124</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:339.

<sup>125</sup> Dilthey, SW 1:141ff.; 4:313–14.

<sup>126</sup> Dilthey, SW 1:141–7; 4:346.

<sup>127</sup> Dilthey, SW 1:145.

<sup>128</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:313.

True, like Ranke, Dilthey does not deny that there may be coherence in the *Zusammenhang* of philosophers of history. But, anticipating Weber, he never fails to note that this coherence derives more from the “conceptual unity” of abstract “interconnected principles” than from “the interconnectedness [*Zusammenhang*] of historical reality.”<sup>129</sup>

To express the difference between these two conceptions of coherence and unity, Dilthey distinguishes between an “abstract” or “rational” or “logical” *Zusammenhang* and a “real” or “experience-based” or “fact-based” or “historical” one.<sup>130</sup> Knowledge of connectedness in the latter, it turns out, is what historians with a philosophical bent produce, for real connectedness is “given in life” not in abstraction from life.<sup>131</sup> He concludes, therefore, that the task of the historian is twofold: to penetrate to the level of particular interactions in history and to gain “insight” into their “systematic” connectedness – that is, into the “structure” (*Zusammenhang*) that binds them together and allows them to be viewed as a coherent whole.<sup>132</sup>

We miss much of what Dilthey is suggesting here if we only apply his notion of “insight” to the work of individual historians. So restricted, insight would be equivalent to the “intuition” of the historian, an idea that in Dilthey’s day – in the form of Nietzsche’s notion of the gift of individual genius – tended to subjectivize and relativize historical knowledge. Hegel, Dilthey admitted, had this gift and organized his historical work around such a “metaphysical-historical insight.”<sup>133</sup>

But Dilthey insisted that the insight of which he spoke was discursive and the result of a collective scholarly exercise that occurs in time and changes with time as scholars learn more about the past. With Nietzsche on his mind, Dilthey aims his methodological scruples at what he called “the Nietzschean misery of exaggerated subjectivity.”<sup>134</sup> Thus, one of his main points was to recommend method as a means by which scholars could control for “subjective arbitrariness”<sup>135</sup> in their profession.<sup>136</sup> Dilthey does not deny – any more that Chladenius and Semler in the eighteenth century had – that historical inquiry begins in subjectivity – with the situatedness of the historian. But he recoils – as any one who accepts Kant’s argument about “beliefs of reason” must – from the notion that the

<sup>129</sup> Dilthey, SW 1:142–3, 164–6; 4:325.

<sup>130</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:229–34, 235–58.

<sup>131</sup> Dilthey, SW 1:147; 3:158–9, 217; 4:254.

<sup>132</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:165–6.

<sup>133</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:171–3.

<sup>134</sup> Dilthey, SW 4:326.

<sup>135</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:238.

<sup>136</sup> Martyn Thompson’s distinction between “philosophical hermeneutics” and “methodological hermeneutics” is useful here, for the latter is designed to control for subjectivity in historical inquiry. See his “Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning,” *History and Theory* 32, no. 3 (1999): 248–72.

fact that historical inquiry begins in subjectivity does not mean that historians can only produce knowledge that is subjective. Such is Kant's belief of reason, Cassirer's rationalistic postulate, and the German historians' presupposition that connectedness is essential to historical inquiry and the production of historical knowledge.

To defend his position on the possibility of objective historical knowledge, Dilthey realizes that he must explain how such knowledge is produced. He begins with his and Droysen's distinction between the natural and the human sciences. He argues that while "objectivity" in a scientific sense is not possible in either the historical or human sciences, the knowledge produced by historians can "approximate" reality.<sup>137</sup> Tellingly, Dilthey then reintroduces the idea of *Zusammenhang* to the discussion. He asks, "is it possible to know the nexus [*Zusammenhang*] of the historical world and to find the [methodological] means for bringing it [to light]," thereby making it the object of "objective conceptual cognition"?<sup>138</sup> His answer is yes, and he explains why by stressing the progressive methodological argument of the Humboldtian tradition of scholarship.<sup>139</sup>

Dilthey's own term for this method is "composite procedure" (*zusammengesetztes Verfahren*).<sup>140</sup> And he includes in the procedure a historiographical dimension that transforms the debate about objective historical knowledge into one about the quality of knowledge produced by a scholarly discipline in the round and over time. It is this knowledge – disciplinary knowledge – that Dilthey says constitutes the knowledge presented and "re-presented" by history.<sup>141</sup> Before him, Müller had indicated in his own discussion of what he had called the "progressive method" that historical knowledge was the result of each historian's checking his knowledge against the work of others in the field – which is why Müller included in his 1825 study of Greek myths a long section on the history of historical work in that field. With that move, unique in its day, Müller made historiography a key element in the production of historical knowledge and identified it as essential to the progressive method's aim of achieving that kind of objectively valid knowledge.

In keeping with Müller and the Humboldtian tradition, then, Dilthey envisages historical knowledge as representational knowledge that changes over time and reflects the historical discipline's attempt to produce objective knowledge by historiographical as well as historical means. Operating with the method of

<sup>137</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:164–6, 324–8.

<sup>138</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:238.

<sup>139</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:166.

<sup>140</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:329.

<sup>141</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:141, 161, 166, 239, 324–30, 354.

connectedness, the latter produces information about context, and operating with converging and diverging views of context, the former offers the discipline methodological pause for reflection on the knowledge of context produced by different historians. According to Dilthey, this is the moment of “objective comprehension” for the discipline, the moment when the discipline as a collective professional body “make[s] progressively objective conceptual” judgments about which representations of the past should become part of the discipline’s “factually existing continuum.”<sup>142</sup> Or, as he put it more precisely,<sup>143</sup> this is the moment when the discipline passes judgment on itself as a “factual nexus” (*tatsächlichen Zusammenhang*).

According to Dilthey, in other words, the result of thinking about history and historiography in terms of *Zusammenhang* is a “structure” (*Zusammenhang*) of what has been professionally determined to be “factually given” in history.<sup>144</sup> As he notes, moreover, there is no pretension here of an “objective” correspondence between historiography and history.<sup>145</sup> And yet for him historiography as the “nexus” of historical cognition is “real” knowledge in a discursive sense even though it is not a mirror image of reality in an empirical sense. And because the aim of *Zusammenhang* as a composite methodological procedure involved constantly juxtaposing the objective conceptual cognition of historiography and the ever changing results of individual historical research, it was incumbent, Dilthey said, on historians to think of their discipline as a vocation in which the idea of scholarship applied as much to the public stance one took toward the work of others (i.e., to historiography) as to the methodological rigor (or lack thereof) of their own individual work. Early in the nineteenth century Humboldt, Niebuhr, and Müller had said this. Dilthey reiterates the point and gives a philosophical explanation for it at the end of the century.

## EPILOGUE

During the last twenty years of his life, Max Weber spent much time writing about methodology in the social and human sciences. As part of that endeavor he devoted himself to exploring whether or not history as an academic discipline could produce objective knowledge. Even though he was one of the towering figures of twentieth-century intellectual history, Weber remained like many of his generation something of a Kantian in epistemological matters, especially when the subject had to do with what he and Kant called “the objective validity” of

<sup>142</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:237–38, 324–5.

<sup>143</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:324–5.

<sup>144</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:324.

<sup>145</sup> Dilthey, SW 3:327.

knowledge.<sup>146</sup> Weber, moreover, acknowledged<sup>147</sup> – as Dilthey also had<sup>148</sup> – that the Kantian trinity – unity of consciousness, unity of knowledge, and connectedness as allowing for the unity of historical knowledge – had shaped his own thinking about method. And in addition to using Droysen and Dilthey to make a general distinction between the natural and human or cultural sciences, he consistently drew upon Windelband's and Rickert's distinction between the nomothetic and idiographic methods to bolster his argument in favor of the latter.<sup>149</sup>

Similarly, and toward the end of his life – in his famous lecture “Science as a Vocation” (1918) – Weber fully embraced the notion that the human and historical sciences required scholars to be open to change in their discipline's understanding of the past.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, like others in the Humboldtian tradition before him, Weber associated such openness with the scholarly duty to give a “systematic exposition” of one's own work “in relationship” to that of others.<sup>151</sup> So not only does he join with others in recognizing what Reinhart Koselleck has called the “temporalization of historical perspective,” but he also concedes, in his words, that historical knowledge is always meant to be “surpassed”<sup>152</sup> and is only capable of producing objectively possible “approximation” of reality rather than “some sort of permanently and universally valid classification” of it.<sup>153</sup>

But if an approximation of reality does not so much express “the ‘actual’ interconnections [*Zusammenhänge*] of things,” what does it express?<sup>154</sup> Weber's answer is that it expresses the interconnections of relationships that scholars have logically (i.e., historiographically in the case of historians) “grouped” together in order to give conceptual focus to the questions they ask about the past<sup>155</sup> – not the past in general so much as individual contexts/patterns in the past<sup>156</sup> that they hope to investigate and master through the ordering principle of the idea of context itself.<sup>157</sup>

Weber is quite clear on this, for he holds that a “context” (*Zusammenhang*) is a historiographical concept that is used by historians as “an analytical instrument for the intellectual mastery of empirical data.”<sup>158</sup> For Weber, therefore, a context is

<sup>146</sup> Weber, MSS 106–7.

<sup>147</sup> Weber, MSS 106–7.

<sup>148</sup> Dilthey, SW, 3:109ff., 123, 129, 217, 276.

<sup>149</sup> Weber, MSS 132, 135, 142, 155, 160–1.

<sup>150</sup> See “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber*, ed. H. Gerth et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958) [henceforth SV], 137–8.

<sup>151</sup> Weber, MSS 60.

<sup>152</sup> SV, 138.

<sup>153</sup> Weber, MSS 84.

<sup>154</sup> Weber, MSS 68.

<sup>155</sup> SV, 139.

<sup>156</sup> Weber, MSS 72, 79, 84, 101.

<sup>157</sup> Weber, MSS 75, 84, 105–6.

<sup>158</sup> Weber, MSS 105–6.

a “mental construct” (*Gedankenbild*) that represents the cumulative learning and collective judgment of scholars over long periods.<sup>159</sup> For this reason, Weber holds that historical knowledge is disciplinary, discursive, and intersubjective rather than a priori, individual, and subjective. Weber warned, however, that the methodological danger here was for scholars to forget that these constructs and contexts were meant to be “heuristic” before they could be deemed real and given by experience: that is, before the profession judged and validated them either on the whole or in parts as composed of “causal component[s] of an historical nexus [*Zusammenhang*].”<sup>160</sup>

In terms of scholarship, therefore, a “historical context” (*Zusammenhang*) is formed when professional historians pass “judgments of objective possibility”<sup>161</sup> on the particular contributions individual historians have made to the understanding of the past. Over time, to be sure, these collective judgments give certain representations of the past more standing in the profession than others – that is to say, some have more “objective validity” than others. By the same token, those contributions with the most objective validity become objects of cognition for the profession. True, there is a “transitoriness” about what neo-Kantians like Weber and Cassirer call those moments of “objective synthesis” in the discipline’s ever expanding collective knowledge of the past<sup>162</sup> – which, of course is why Weber agrees with Dilthey and other Humboldtians when he declares openness to “progress” in knowledge to be the methodological core of thinking in the human and historical sciences.<sup>163</sup>

Still, Weber and Cassirer insist that moments of such synthesis are “stopping” places where historical inquiry is temporarily halted in order for the discipline to take stock of and evaluate the information it has accumulated.<sup>164</sup> So, when Weber says that “a context” (*Zusammenhang*) is constituted by “the conceptual interconnections [*Zusammenhänge*] of [historiographically identified] problems” rather than by the “‘actual’ interconnections [*Zusammenhänge*] of [real historical] things,” he is adding a discursive historiographical dimension to the role method plays in the production of objective historical knowledge.<sup>165</sup> But he is doing more than that, for he is saying that connectedness is a “categorically formed reality” that enables historians to “construct [an] unreal” historical *Zusammenhang* before they turn around and begin to use the construct as a heuristic device to aid them in

<sup>159</sup> Weber, MSS 90, 93, 173.

<sup>160</sup> Weber, MSS 135, 141–2.

<sup>161</sup> Weber, MSS 80–93, 164ff.

<sup>162</sup> Weber, MSS 104–5. For Cassirer, see *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1955), 1:101, 281.

<sup>163</sup> Dilthey, SV 137–8.

<sup>164</sup> Cassirer, *Symbolic*, 1:89–90, 280–1.

<sup>165</sup> Weber, MSS 68.



discovering a “real” historical *Zusammenhang*.<sup>166</sup> This is why Weber argues that in our understanding of a historical context “we ‘must become objective’” toward the idea of a context as a cognitive object of the discipline before the context “‘belongs to history’ as an object.”<sup>167</sup> Thus, as a methodological principle the idea of connectedness – *Zusammenhang* – is not only an *a priori* presupposition of the historical enterprise – a “practical *a priori*,” as Troeltsch once said<sup>168</sup> – but also an *a posteriori* act of collective reflection that makes objective historical knowledge possible in a discursive sense.<sup>169</sup> At bottom, that is what nineteenth-century German historians thought they had achieved by adding philosophical considerations to their vocational bias toward facts.

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<sup>166</sup> Weber, MSS 186, 188.

<sup>167</sup> Weber, MSS 158.

<sup>168</sup> Troeltsch, “Modern Philosophy of History,” 307.

<sup>169</sup> Troeltsch, “Modern Philosophy of History,” 307, 315–16.

## PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY: THE GERMAN TRADITION FROM HERDER TO MARX

JOHN ZAMMITO

### PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The term “philosophy of history” was coined by Voltaire in the years 1756–65, between his *Essay on Customs* and his *Philosophy of History*. He explicitly identified it with responding to his mistress’s concern that history seemed to reveal nothing but a chain of human folly. As Voltaire and others saw it, the real matter of history was not politics, war, and conquest – the grim record that earlier generations had chronicled all too fully – but rather the constructive and creative enterprises of art, science, and industry. In contemplating human history, Enlightenment thinkers conceived reason as the antithesis of religious dogma and traditional authority that kept man in ignorance, superstition and subordination. Yet the Enlightenment found itself amassing considerable evidence that contradicted its prevailing assumption about the timelessness and ubiquity of its conception of reason, of its conception of morality, of its conception of political and cultural order. Ethnographic and historical evidence propelled the more candid among its thinkers to recognize that drastically different criteria of truth, order and value prevailed in different geographical and historical contexts. This variety undermined not only the linearity of the doctrine of progress but also the very idea that reason itself constituted a timeless and criterial certainty. How could Enlightenment history do justice to the majesty of a medieval cathedral or the wisdom of an American-Indian myth? How was it to assess the significance of anything not explicitly utilitarian? Myth, poetry, ritual, and custom – all seemed to Enlightenment historians to be so contaminated with unreason that no redemption was possible. They found in the historical record, case after case of the same follies and contradictions, irresolvable and ironic, and history seemed to confirm nothing so much as the utter misery of the human condition: division, suffering, disillusion and despair. Therewith most of the past became simply a scandal from which only the future could redeem man. History seemed, as Hume would have it, little more than the record of human folly.

Voltaire did not deny that much about the past had just this character, yet it did concern him that history should appear altogether meaningless. The danger was not merely a contemplative melancholy but more dangerously a practical apathy whereby nothing constructive might be undertaken in the world. If historical inquiry did not *assure* us of meaning – or, more precisely, of the prospect of human flourishing – it should not, for Voltaire, foreclose that possibility, and there must be at least moments in the past when some “light” could be discerned. For Voltaire, the past became an archive from which to pluck out moments of human flourishing; and history, the project whereby such occurrences could be demonstrated. His view, to be sure, was that the most recent and the most impressive such moment had been in his own France at the time of his birth, the “splendid” age of Louis XIV.<sup>1</sup> And it was, accordingly, against the standard of that achieved excellence that he measured not only his own present but all other epochs of the past and all prospects of the future.<sup>2</sup> But Voltaire offered no guarantee of such human flourishing: for him it was a distinct rarity in the human record.

If Voltaire was content with exemplary moments of human flourishing and the mere possibility that they might now and again arise in the course of human history, his countrymen and contemporaries were not so content. Some – most prominently Montesquieu and the Scots – sought to establish a typology or a sequence of stages of social development out of which at least to organize the temporal and geographical diversity of human experience, with an inclination, stronger among the Scots, to believe that this demonstrated a progressive trajectory in whose vanguard European civilization pressed forward.<sup>3</sup> Others went further: Turgot and Condorcet endeavored to *prove* that it was the destiny of the

<sup>1</sup> Voltaire, *The Age of Louis XIV*, trans. Martyn P. Pollack (New York: Dutton, 1926); see the old but exemplary W. H. Lewis, *The Splendid Century* (New York: Sloan, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> On Voltaire’s historiography see Paul Sakmann, “The Problem of Historical Method and of Philosophy of History in Voltaire,” *History and Theory*, suppl. 11 (1971): 24–59.

<sup>3</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). The specific thrust of the Scottish school was to develop the “four stages” theory of historical development, which put primary stress on the economic institutions of each stage of society and on the laws of property. See Adam Smith, “The Four Stages of Society” (from *Lectures in Jurisprudence*), in *The Scottish Enlightenment: An Anthology*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1997), 475–87. See also John Brewer, “Conjectural History, Sociology and Social Change in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: Adam Ferguson and the Division of Labour,” in *The Making of Modern Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change*, eds. David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick, and Pat Straw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 13–30; H. M. Höpfl, “From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment,” *Journal of British Studies* 17 (1978): 19–40; Roger Emerson, “American Indians, Frenchmen, and Scots Philosophers,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 9 (1979): 211–36.

human species to flourish in the ripeness of time, and thus they attempted to project a utopian future on the basis of the trajectory of the past.<sup>4</sup>

These “philosophers of history” in the eighteenth century aimed to articulate the significance of the whole sweep of the past most pointedly *for the sake of the future*. That is, they were committed to a standard of *progress*.<sup>5</sup> Its signal warrant appeared to be the advance of knowledge whereby the moderns could at long last affirm their superiority over the ancients.<sup>6</sup> They were also confident that they grasped the mechanism of this historical progress, namely the critical application of reason.<sup>7</sup> And, finally, they conceived this whole interpretation of history in a eudaimonistic frame; happiness, they were sure, was the purpose of (individual) human life, and more humans were happier than they had been in the past. Moreover, since humanity now understood the principle whereby to secure it, the prospect of the greater good for a greater number seemed assured.<sup>8</sup> Such a view evoked dissent, of course. Against all of these “philosophies of history” Jean-Jacques Rousseau pronounced his own: that far from being progress, the historical record of mankind showed rather a course of moral decadence made all the more acute by the amassing of material luxury and intellectual adornment.<sup>9</sup>

Speculative philosophy of history arose as the resolution of dilemmas and impasses into which the thought of the Enlightenment had fallen. The investigation of morality, art, religion, and politics – that realm of the creations of the human spirit – could not be well served by a mechanical approach. Indeed,

<sup>4</sup> Frank Edward Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962); *The Shapes of Philosophical History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1965). See also Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

<sup>5</sup> Here there is warrant to reconsider Carl Becker’s fierce little classic, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1932). While undoubtedly it is overstated, it nonetheless says something essential about the age, without which Herder’s fury would be hard to fathom. For a correction of some of the overstatement, see Henry Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> A. Owens Aldridge, “Ancients and Moderns in the Eighteenth Century,” *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Scribners, 1968), 1:76–87.

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), drawing especially on Jean Le Ronde d’Alembert’s *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, trans. Richard N. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Thus the line from Helvétius and Bentham to full-fledged nineteenth-century utilitarianism, as Élie Halévy documented in his classic history, *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

<sup>9</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the Discourses*, ed. G. D. H. Cole (New York: Dutton, 1973); on Rousseau see especially Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), and George Armstrong Kelly, *Idealism, Politics and History: Sources of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

the Enlightenment marks the moment at which the idea first firmly asserted itself – in large measure *against* the prevailing opinion – that the methods necessary and appropriate for the study of man diverged significantly from those that applied adequately in natural science.<sup>10</sup> Its critics found powerful arguments for the autonomy of spirit and the consequent need for an alternative method. Thus the idea of *schöne Wissenschaften* or *Geisteswissenschaften* – literally, “beautiful sciences” or “sciences of spirit” – emerged, together with the consideration of a *method* proper to such disciplines.<sup>11</sup> Allan Megill has made a powerful case for the primacy of the new concern with *aesthetics* as the driving force behind the emergence of a distinctively eighteenth-century historicism.<sup>12</sup>

It was in Germany that these questions came to most acute philosophical articulation – in the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Karl Marx.<sup>13</sup> German speculative philosophy of history arose in the context of the consolidation of a professional academic discipline of history in Germany in the late eighteenth century: the massive project of *Weltgeschichte* launched by Sigmund Baumgarten on the basis of British models; the parallel reception of the key texts of the Scottish Enlightenment on history and the “science of man” from Hume, Ferguson, Robertson, Smith and others; and finally the development of “pragmatic” historiography by the Göttingen school around Johann Gatterer.<sup>14</sup> Disciplinary history drew upon three other, more established fields: first, classical philology, especially Johann Winckelmann’s revival of interest in Greek sculpture and Christian Heyne’s archaeological concept of the *Totalhabitus*; second, biblical criticism, especially the historicization of the Bible from Richard Simon and Baruch Spinoza to Johann David Michaelis; and, finally, developmental linguistics, the recognition of language “families” and genealogical theories of their relation.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> G. Vico, *The New Science* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984); Herder (see later discussion); and Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York: Viking, 1976).

<sup>11</sup> On the notion of *schöne Wissenschaft*, see my *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 35–40.

<sup>12</sup> Allan Megill, “Aesthetic Theory and Historical Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century,” *History and Theory* 17 (1978): 29–62.

<sup>13</sup> Contrast this account with that offered by Harold Mah, “German Historical Thought in the Age of Herder, Kant, and Hegel,” in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, eds. L. Kramer and S. Maza (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 143–65.

<sup>14</sup> Horst Walter Blanke and Dirk Fleischer, eds., *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Bad Cannstatt, 1990); Hans Erich Bödeker, Georg Iggers, Jonathan Knudsen, and Peter Reill, eds., *Aufklärung und Geschichte: Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>15</sup> A short but very persuasive reconstruction along these lines is developed in Aviezer Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46–93.

This was also the moment, as Reinhard Koselleck has contended, of the emergence of the “historical singular,” the idea that there is *one* history (*Geschichte*) of which many partial accounts (*Historien*) have been formulated.<sup>16</sup> The notion of the past and the notion of its construal collapsed into the same, indiscriminate locution: *Geschichte* has henceforth always meant both. But the singular suggested at the same time a *totality*, a whole past, and more than just the past: It could only be understood if it encompassed the present and especially the future. The moment of history’s disciplinary inauguration was thus galvanized by two deep anxieties: first, where might the future be taking mankind, especially since the sense of acceleration (“progress”) was simultaneously a sense of rupture from the past. Second, how could the entire past be conceived as a meaningful whole, especially when it had lost that continuity with the present, out of which had been spun its traditional moral lessons (*historia magistra vitae*)?<sup>17</sup> Philosophy of history and the concomitant craze for *Universalgeschichte* were responses to just this quandary.<sup>18</sup> At one and the same time, historians asked themselves how they could construct particular histories in the absence of a *general principle of historical method*, and they saw this implicating them in the pursuit of some grander *theory of history as a whole* from which they could deduce the parameters of their more specific inquiries.<sup>19</sup>

#### JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER

Johann Gottfried Herder is recognized by many as a seminal figure in the emergence of the historical consciousness that dominated thought in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> He was a pioneer of hermeneutic historicism, yet he was not a member

<sup>16</sup> Reinhard Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 21–58; Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002). See my “Koselleck’s Philosophy of Historical Time(s) and the Practice of History: A Review Essay,” *History and Theory* 43 (2004): 124–35.

<sup>18</sup> “The main flaw of the *Welthistorie* [compendium edited by Baumgarten] was its lack of one large conspectus: it was a mere aggregate.... Professional historians, such as Gatterer and Schlözer, who for that reason rejected it as a model for a truly universal history, tried in vain to find a working solution for this problem” (J. Van der Zande, “Popular Philosophy of Mankind in Eighteenth-Century Germany,” *Storia della Storiografia* 22 [1992]: 37–56, citing 45). Van der Zande indeed suggests that by the end of the century the project of “universal history” split from that of the “philosophy of history of mankind,” the former seeking a grand metanarrative of events, the latter seeking a fundamental human nature (53).

<sup>19</sup> These concerns are manifest in A. L. von Schlözer’s *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie* (1772; Waltrop: H. Spenner, 1997), the target of a nasty review by Herder.

<sup>20</sup> On the historical preoccupation of the nineteenth century see Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1971); Ernst Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science, and History After Hegel*, trans.

of the academic guild of historians. Indeed, his famous controversy over historical method with August von Schlözer in 1773 antagonized disciplinary historians of his day irretrievably.<sup>21</sup> Yet later historical theorists, starting with Wilhelm Dilthey, have recognized Herder as a progenitor of their practice.<sup>22</sup> Though he proclaimed in the preface to his masterpiece, *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784–91), that the time was not yet ripe for such an endeavor, his own work represented the most exemplary and elegant speculative history in the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

How did Herder's philosophy of history relate to the others that proliferated in the second half of the eighteenth century?<sup>24</sup> In Germany, concern for *meaning* in history – entailing totality, teleology and theology – could not be extricated from the negative challenge posed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to the idea of moral progress or from the idealistic postulations of the theologian Johann Spalding in *Contemplation of the Destiny of Man* (1748).<sup>25</sup> These formed the backdrop of Isaac Iselin's *History of Mankind* (1764) and of a controversy

Charles Hendel et al. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950), and Hans Reichenbach, *Geschichtsphilosophie nach Hegel* (Freiburg: Alber, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> J. G. Herder, "A. L. von Schlözers Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie" (1772), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. B. Suphan (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877–1913) [henceforth SW], 5:436–40. See Robert Leventhal, "Progression and Particularity: Herder's Critique of Schlözer's Universal History in the Context of the Early Writings," in *Johann Gottfried Herder: Language, History, and the Enlightenment*, ed. Wolf Koepke (Charleston, S.C.: Camden House, 1990), 25–45; Karl Fink, "The Rhetoric of the Review: Schlözer and Herder on Universal History," in *The Eighteenth Century German Book Review*, eds. Herbert Rowland and Karl Fink (Heidelberg: Winter, 1995), 57–72.

<sup>22</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 95. See Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (orig. German ed., 1936; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Rudolf Stadelmann, *Der historische Sinn bei Herder* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1928). On the other hand, the notion of "historicism" developed by Stadelmann and Meinecke is deeply flawed by a German nationalism, an "irrationalism," and a radical relativism that must not be projected uncritically back onto Herder. See George Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, rev. ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> Herder, *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, Preface (SW:13:10), in *On World History: Johann Gottfried Herder, An Anthology*, eds. H. Adler and E. Menze (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 16. Where possible, translations selected from Herder's *Ideas* for this anthology will be used; otherwise, translations will be from the full version, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, trans. T. Churchill (1800; New York: Bergman, 1966), amended if noted.

<sup>24</sup> One endeavor to answer this question is Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Herder and the Enlightenment Philosophy of History," in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), 166–82. It is useful primarily for its consideration of Herder in terms of the problem of the temporalization of the "great chain of being," which Lovejoy so compellingly reconstructed in his masterwork, and for the discussion of Bolingbroke. My own interpretation will, however, take a different line.

<sup>25</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, in *The Social Contract and the Discourses*, ed. G. D. H. Cole (New York: Dutton, 1973); Johann Spalding, *Spaldings Bestimmung des Menschen*, ed. Horst Stephan (Giessen: Oöpelmann, 1908).

between Moses Mendelssohn and Thomas Abbt over Spalding, human destiny, and history.<sup>26</sup> In turn, these German episodes instigated Herder's first and most influential text in the philosophy of history, *Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Mankind* (1774).<sup>27</sup> But the main provocation for Herder's intervention was the "philosophical history" articulated by Voltaire. The latter's Eurocentric condescension, the beginning of what we know as "Whig history," offended Herder's "historical sense."<sup>28</sup> Already in 1769 Herder could comment ironically, "Our century is too refined, too political, and too philosophical [to appreciate earlier epochs]."<sup>29</sup> By 1774 his outrage with smug presentism, with European despotism and imperialism cloaked in glorious "philosophical" rationalizations, erupted into the scathing ironies of *Another Philosophy of History*. Far from subscribing to the Scottish theory of human "improvement," culminating in contemporary European social order, Herder had reservations about the commercialization of modern society strongly resembling Rousseau's.<sup>30</sup> Thus in a 1772 review he faulted Millar for having a bias toward presentism, offering "a one-sided history of the human race" that failed to recognize that every epoch was an end in itself – the only view, he asserted, that would befit "the true dignity of philosophy."<sup>31</sup>

In Letter 122 of his *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (1792), Herder put it succinctly: "A history of our species calls for mercantile-political considerations only in small part; its spirit is the *sensus humanitatis*, sensibility and empathy for all humankind."<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Herder was profoundly influenced by the historical inflection of aesthetic theory among the Scots – the dissertations of Hugh Blair revolving around "Ossian" but devolving decisively on Shakespeare and folk poetry, the whole linguistic-literary evocation of "primitive" cultures when "poetry was the mother-tongue of peoples."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>26</sup> On the Mendelssohn-Abbt dispute, see my *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology*, 165–71.

<sup>27</sup> J. G. Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, in *Werke in zehn Bänden*, eds. Martin Bollacher et al. (Frankfurt: Deutsche Klassiker, 1985–) [henceforth DKV, cited by volume and page numbers], 4:9–107. Translated by Ioannis Evrigenis and David Pellerin as *Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Mankind* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> DKV, 4:54–68. See also Herder's review of Beattie (1772) (SW 5:457).

<sup>29</sup> J. G. Herder, "On the Earliest Documents of Mankind" (1769), in *Schriften zum alten Testament*, ed. Rudolf Smend (DKV 5:11–30); trans. in *On World History*, 86.

<sup>30</sup> Herder criticized the commercialization in *Another Philosophy of History*, as well as in *Ideas*, SW 13:310ff, Eng. trans., 202ff.

<sup>31</sup> Herder, Review of Millar, SW 5:455.

<sup>32</sup> Herder, *Letters Concerning the Advancement of Humanity* 122 (1797), SW 18:291, trans. in *On World History*, 48.

<sup>33</sup> See my "Die Rezeption der Schottischen Aufklärung in Deutschland: Herders entscheidende Einsicht," in *Europäische Kulturtransfer im 18. Jahrhundert: Literaturen in Europa – europäische Literatur?* eds. Uwe Steiner, Brunhilde Wehinger, and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2003), 113–38.



Herder saw as the real project of a “history of mankind” not to trace the trajectory of “progress,” but to discriminate the varieties of human excellence. It was Herder who first effectively asserted the principle that history must take as its object unique epochs, peoples or cultures as individualities, to be judged according to intrinsic principles of their own articulation, not by some abstract and external standard imposed from the historian’s time. In *Another Philosophy of History* Herder put it in its most memorable form: “every nation has its own center of well-being within itself, just as every globe has its center of gravity.”<sup>34</sup> He held that “the uniqueness of each people is more striking in its spiritual form than in its material,” and accordingly he sought to “conjure up before our eyes the spirit of a people.”<sup>35</sup> It was this uniqueness above all that Herder believed history should capture.<sup>36</sup> “Let each moment speak for itself, and explicate itself, where possible, in its location, without our dragging in an explanation from a favorite region.”<sup>37</sup>

Herder reacted explicitly against the Enlightenment approach that I have described. Indeed, he was among the first to be sensitive to all its inadequacies and to raise a systematic objection to them, on the one hand, and to inaugurate an alternative approach, on the other. The most decisive idea behind Herder’s reconceptualization of historical interpretation was *organicism*, the idea that works of human purpose had a structure analogous to that of living organisms, in which the various parts were coordinated within a whole, through which alone their particular nature and function became comprehensible. Accordingly, this led Herder to assess the symbolic integrity of human artifacts in terms of new formal and structural principles that found order, intelligibility, and rationality in places the Enlightenment had been wont only to see evidence of imaginative extravagance or benighted superstition. Not only might a poem or a genre be read in this new trope, but so could peoples, cultures, states, and epochs. To be sure, Vico had argued earlier for such interpretative principles, but he was not read, and it was only with Herder that the organicist model became incorporated in

<sup>34</sup> DKV 4:39, trans. in *Another Philosophy of History*, 29, amended.

<sup>35</sup> Gerald Broce writes, “Herder is especially concerned with the world views and values of native peoples as expressed in language, mythology, folk-song, and ‘national character.’ . . . In contrast, he shows little interest in native institutions – in economic and social organization, trade, legal customs, and so forth.” “Herder and Ethnography,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 22 (1986): 150–70, citing 163.

<sup>36</sup> Roy Pascal, “Herder and the Scottish Historical School,” *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, n.s. 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 23–42, citing 33. Pascal claims that “in contrast with their [the Scottish historians’] sober, scientific conceptions, . . . Herder’s are obscure and confused,” but he does grant that Herder’s recognition of “beliefs of a people as an historical force, actively contributing in shaping the future of that people,” represented a valid counterpoint to their economic-institutional contextualism (40–1). For a more nuanced view, see Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civil Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Herder, *Zerstreute Blätter*, 1792 (SW 16:51–83, citing 54), trans. in *On World History*, 65.

the arsenal of literary and cultural history in a decisive manner.<sup>38</sup> Thus Herder helped establish the terms for a distinctive and as it were living “spirit” unique to a people, a nation, an epoch: *Völkgeist*, *nationaler Geist*, *Zeitgeist*. This indwelling spirit informed every artifact of that individuality, so that it could be read out of all forms of its practice – from folkways to political constitutions, from musical forms to business contracts. But the highest and most revealing form in which that spirit would be articulated would be in the literature and especially the poetry of that culture. This conception of history as composed of integral individualities with their own intrinsic principles of unity and totality, together with the method of empathetic understanding without moral judgment, radically undermined the Enlightenment’s privilege of the present and, with it, the doctrine of progress as a simple movement toward the utilitarian calculation of “enlightened self-interest.” Herder dwelled rather on the beauty and uniqueness of all historical events as equally valuable in their manifestations of spirituality and, indeed, evidence of divine presence (immanent Providence).

As with Vico, Herder’s new historicism proved most powerful in retrieving the historical meaning precisely of those aboriginal or “primitive” cultural achievements that had seemed so irrationally resistant to Enlightenment understanding. It was Herder’s premise that “ancient theological-philosophical-historical national traditions were enveloped in a sensuous, image-rich language ...,” “consummate poetry,” “to the highest degree ... popular and sensuous.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, a more hermeneutic-historical recourse to this body of materials was the way “to infuse life into Iselin’s history of humankind.”<sup>40</sup> Herder proposed to retrieve what “is alive in the documents of this age of the world.”<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, he offered historical conjectures in keeping “with the mentality, language, and customs” of the specific people, which would all, in this early moment, be expressed “in terms of religion.”<sup>42</sup> Specifically, this underwrote Herder’s attempt to interpret the biblical creation narrative as a document concerning the origins of mankind. Herder insisted that “the first Mosaic chapters are *documents* ... [that] contain reports of the most ancient matters of mankind.”<sup>43</sup> He took this to be a sharp and decisive departure from the practices of the universal historians and philosophers of history of the mainstream Enlightenment:

And finally, the writers of history par excellence, the scientists, the philosophers, the writers – what piles of dreams, fables, suppositions, fairy tales, hypotheses have they

<sup>38</sup> Berlin, *Vico and Herder*; see my “Herder, *Sturm und Drang*, and ‘Expressivism’: Problems in Reception-History,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 27, no. 2 (2006): 51–74.

<sup>39</sup> Herder, “On the Earliest Documents of Mankind” (DKV 5:14), trans. in *On World History*, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Herder, “Earliest Documents,” DKV 5:16, trans. in *On World History*, 85.

<sup>41</sup> Herder, “Earliest Documents,” DKV 5:16, trans. in *On World History*, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Herder, “Earliest Documents,” DKV 5:13, trans. in *On World History*, 83.

<sup>43</sup> Herder, “Earliest Documents,” DKV 5:22, trans. in *On World History*, 90.

heaped together everywhere to fill the gaps, to turn Moses into the pragmatic writer of history of the world, of its peoples, of learning and art, with due attention to causation and consequences and all that goes along with them.<sup>44</sup>

Genesis was an archaic text. The documents associated with Moses needed to be interpreted hermeneutically and with historical distance, not assimilated to contemporary models of human nature. This was Herder's pioneering "historical sense."

While Herder thus advanced the hermeneutic theory of empathetic insight and the idea of formal integrity of individualities, he also sought a comprehensive vision of the whole of history, "universal history," as it was known in the late eighteenth century. For Herder, the Enlightenment was wrong not in seeking such a comprehensive vision of the whole, but in assuming so mechanical and materialistic a perspective on this problem. Herder, too, wanted a sense of the whole, but he resisted identifying the whole with the end or *telos*. Totality, for Herder, could only signify a historical ensemble: all the distinctive actualizations of the multifarious possibilities of humanity, which the course of human history set out, not in hermetic isolation, not without partial cumulation and mutual influence, but adamantly, without a singular, linear, progressive *telos*. The analogy to an organism, especially to plant life, could be carried further to encompass the idea of a process of development, and to apply that to the growth, maturity, and decline of forms of human action. Combining organicism with this idea of development, Herder could then recognize higher-order cumulation in history. Already in the *Essay on the Origins of Language* (1771), Herder adopted a theory of language that was, as Hans-Dietrich Irmscher noted, at once *genetic* and *organic*.<sup>45</sup> He extended this combined notion to the history of peoples in the *Ideas*.<sup>46</sup> This is the essential feature of his key concept of *Humanität*. In *Ideas*, Herder wrote, "I wish I could extend the signification of the word *humanity*, so as to comprise in it everything I have thus far said on the noble conformation of man to reason and liberty, to finer senses and appetites ... for man has not a more dignified word for his destination than what expresses himself."<sup>47</sup> In his *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*, he elaborated, "The word *humanity* stands for the *character of our kind*,

<sup>44</sup> Herder, "Earliest Documents," DKV 5:23, trans. in *On World History*, 90–1.

<sup>45</sup> Irmscher has noted: "Language is 'genetic' because historical connections constitute themselves in it and thus it keeps the past present. Language is 'organic' because in every speech-act what has been received transforms itself into a form of its own." Hans-Dietrich Irmscher, "Grundfragen der Geschichtsphilosophie Herdes bis 1774," in *Bückeburger Gespräche über Johann Gottfried Herder*, 1783, ed. Brigitte Porschman (Rinteln: Bösendahl, 1984), 10–32, citing 31.

<sup>46</sup> "The education of a generation is therefore in a twofold sense genetic and organic: genetic in view of the manner of the transmission, organic in view of the nature of the assimilation and application of what is being transmitted." Herder, *Ideas* (SW 13:348), Eng. trans., 227–8.

<sup>47</sup> Herder, *Ideas* (SW 13:154), Eng. trans., 98, amended.

but we are born with this character only in terms of disposition, and, to become actual, it must be developed.”<sup>48</sup>

Herder envisioned a kind of history that would combine “cultural history with geography and natural history” to create a “natural history of peoples,” inspired by Buffon’s strategy of a “natural history of man.”<sup>49</sup> Central to Herder was the conviction that there was no essential methodological divide between nature and (human) history; hence he sought to apply a consistent *naturalism* to the origins of mankind, to practice the “natural history” whose cosmological dimension he had learned from Immanuel Kant and whose biological idea he took from the Comte de Buffon and Caspar Friedrich Wolff, as well as Kant.<sup>50</sup> He accepted as a general interpretive principle the idea of *epigenesis*, the emergence of increasing complexity and differentiation, as an immanent principle of *natural development*, an intrinsically *historical* character/tendency of the entire physical world.<sup>51</sup> Man was, accordingly, a *unique emergence*, but *within* nature. As Herder expressed it in a fragmentary essay from 1769, “laws of human and animal nature, I wish to call upon you for succor in the darkness of my labyrinth, [to show me] how the laws of nations are to be formed so that they, like you, will be valid and effectual, make people happy, reach their goal!”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Herder proposed to read even *reason* as a natural emergent: “Reason is not innate, but acquired.... Theoretically and practically, reason is nothing but something *received*, an acquired proportionality and direction of ideas and faculties, to which the human being is formed by its organization and way of life.... He acquires reason from infancy, being formed to it, to freedom, and to human speech through art, as he is to his ingenious mode of movement.”<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Herder, *Letters Concerning the Advancement of Humanity*, 27 (1794) (SW 17:138), trans. in *On World History*, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Reiner Wisbert, Commentary on *Journal meiner Reise im Jahre 1769* (DKV 9:879). “Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle* influenced essentially Herder’s conception of natural history and his way of thinking in general” (898).

<sup>50</sup> Kant, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (Berlin: Akademie Ausgabe, 1902–) [henceforth Ak, cited by volume and pages numbers], 1:215–368; Comte de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1812); Caspar Friedrich Wolff, *Theorie von der Generation* (1759; Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966).

<sup>51</sup> Hans-Dietrich Irmscher notes Herder’s early and distinctive embrace of the idea of epigenesis in “Grundfragen der Geschichtsphilosophie Herders bis 1774,” 18. Elias Palti suggests a more ambivalent relationship, offering a number of distinctions and tensions in the biological theories and in Herder’s reception of them, which he conceives as “uneven developments.” Elias Palti, “The ‘Metaphor of Life’: Herder’s Philosophy of History and Uneven Developments in Late Eighteenth-Century Natural Science,” *History and Theory* 38 (1999): 322–47, *passim*. For more on this, see my “Epigenesis: Concept and Metaphor in Herder’s *Ideen*,” in *Vom Selbstdenken: Aufklärung und Aufklärungskritik in Herders ‘Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit’*, eds. Regina Otto and John H. Zammito (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2001), 129–44.

<sup>52</sup> Herder, “Gesetze der Welt: Gesetze der Körper,” DKV 9:222.

<sup>53</sup> Herder, *Ideen* (SW 13:144), trans. in *On World History*, 133–4.

"It is striking," Hans-Dietrich Irmscher has noted, "that Herder makes absolutely no effort to bridge [the] gaps [between nature and culture] with reference to the freedom of God and those made in his image. Instead, he calls for a continuous, purely immanent historical transition and coherence."<sup>54</sup> But the religious dimension of Herder's own moment and person also intruded: "And as long as we do not know ourselves *as we are today*, how can we know the way in which we *came to be*? Thus, there is called for and indispensable in this matter ... a direct instruction by the Divine.... Either one seeks the excuse not to know of all of this, thus to wander about eternally in this labyrinth of innumerable suppositions concerning the creation of the world, the origin of humankind, of inventions and nations – or, let one search whether a divine voice has deemed us worthy of instruction."<sup>55</sup> This quintessential syncretism shaped the *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* of 1784. Herder's pathbreaking naturalism was complemented – indeed, compromised – by his *religious* ambitions. In *Ideas*, his whole argument for epigenesis *in* Nature was orchestrated to serve (by "analogy") an argument for the immortality of the soul *beyond* Nature.<sup>56</sup> This was a contradiction upon which his fiercest critic, Immanuel Kant, pounced mercilessly.<sup>57</sup> Kant wished to dissociate nature and culture to the highest degree possible without contradiction. As Reinhard Brandt aptly notes, "Kant all through his life rejected the effort in the sphere of natural history to discern a natural transition from merely mechanical to organic nature."<sup>58</sup> Well might Herder have professed to "lay aside metaphysics, and consider the analogies of nature."<sup>59</sup> With Kant we must find him in at least this endeavor thoroughly driven by (religious) metaphysics.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Hans-Dietrich Irmscher, "Grundfragen der Geschichtsphilosophie Herders bis 1774," 27.

<sup>55</sup> Herder, "On the Earliest Documents of Mankind" (DKV 5:17), trans. in *On World History*, 86–7.

<sup>56</sup> Note the organization of the books of Herder's *Ideas*: the natural progression from the theory of forces to the organization of animal and human forms would have followed more logically from the exposition in the early books, but it is deployed precisely to allow Herder his adventure with an analogical aspiration to immortality of the soul.

<sup>57</sup> Kant, "Recensionen von I. G. Herders Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit, Theil 1.2," Ak 8:43–66.

<sup>58</sup> Reinhard Brandt, "Kant – Herder – Kuhn," *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 5 (1980): 27–36, citing 29. On this issue in Kant, see also Friedrich Kaulbach, "Der Zusammenhang zwischen Naturphilosophie und Geschichtsphilosophie bei Kant," *Kant-Studien* 56 (1965): 430–51; Friedrich Kaulbach, "Welchen Nutzen gibt Kant der Geschichtsphilosophie?" *Kant-Studien* 66 (1975): 65–84.

<sup>59</sup> Herder, *Ideas* (SW 13:177), trans. in *On World History*, 114.

<sup>60</sup> But Kant mangled the authentic naturalism in Herder's account on the basis of Herder's supernatural excess. See my "'Method' vs. 'Manner'? Kant's Critique of Herder's *Ideen* in Light of the Epoch of Science, 1790–1820," *Herder Yearbook* (1998): 1–25; and Hans Adler, "Ästhetische und anästhetische Wissenschaft: Kants Herder-Kritik als Dokument moderner Paradigmenkonkurrenz," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 68 (1994): 66–76. See also Hans-Dietrich Irmscher, "Die geschichtsphilosophische Kontroverse zwischen Kant und Herder," in *Hamann – Kant – Herder: Acta des 4. Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums im Herder-Institut zu Marburg/Lehn*, 1985, ed. Bernhard Gajek (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1987), 111–92.

Wolfgang Dörsing puts it bluntly: "The theological presuppositions of the text can only be forced together with a philosophy of history that wishes to be understood in a purely immanent manner."<sup>61</sup>

Two distinct lines flow out of Herder. One is romantic hermeneutics, expressed in the literary criticism of figures such as the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, and Schleiermacher, with its celebration of beauty and uniqueness at the expense of conclusiveness or progress. It found even more Herderian expression in the historicism of Niebuhr, Ranke, and the whole German school, adamantly hostile to any retrospective moral judgment in history and to any grand schema of progress by which it might be instantiated. Every epoch was "immediate unto God," Ranke put it, in language that would have been quite comfortable to Herder.<sup>62</sup> In asserting this, Ranke took exception to the vision of history that had followed the *other* line out of Herder, the line to which I will devote the rest of my remarks: speculative philosophy of history, especially as it came to be articulated by Hegel and radically inverted by Marx.

#### MEDIATIONS: KANT AND SCHILLER

The line from Herder to Hegel is not direct. Ironically, it passes through one of the greatest exponents of Enlightenment: Immanuel Kant. This is so not only in the sense that Kant's philosophical method provided the epistemological and especially the metaphysical materials out of which idealism as a philosophical movement constituted itself. It is also true in terms specifically of Kant's posture on the question of history itself, which arose in direct response to Herder. Herder's intellectual identity and life's work were thoroughly invested in historical hermeneutics and, albeit somewhat negatively, in its disciplinary articulation. But what did all this mean for Kant?<sup>63</sup> To be sure, the notion of *history* was not

<sup>61</sup> Wolfgang Dörsing, "Die Gegenwart im Spiegel der Vergangenheit in Herders *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*," in *Bückeburger Gespräche über Johann Gottfried Herder, 1783*, 33–49, citing 35.

<sup>62</sup> George Iggers and James Powell, eds., *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

<sup>63</sup> Kant wrote of the philosophy of history mainly in explicitly popular writings, and it has been very difficult to find the systematic fit of his philosophy of history in the critical philosophy generally. See especially Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), and Pauline Kleingeld, *Fortschritt und Vernunft* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neuman, 1995); Kleingeld, "Kant, History, and the Idea of Moral Development," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 16 (1999): 59–80. See also Emil Fackenheim, "Kant's Concept of History," *Kant-Studien* 48 (1956–7): 381–98; Burleigh T. Wilkins, "Teleology in Kant's Philosophy of History," *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 172–85; R. F. Atkinson, "Kant's Philosophy of History," in *Substance and Form in History: A Collection of Essays in Philosophy of History*, eds. L. Pompa and W. Dray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 15–26; Louis Dupré, "Kant's Theory of History and Progress," *Review of Metaphysics* 51 (1998): 813–28; Susan Shell, "Kant's Idea of History," in *History and the Idea of Progress*, eds. Arthur Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard

insignificant for Kant. There are two senses of *history* that played major roles in Kant's thinking from his earliest period. First, there is the school-philosophical treatment of *cognitio historica* as the generic term for empirical or experientially acquired knowledge.<sup>64</sup> Thus Kant observed that all knowledge could be construed as *either* historical *or* systematic: that is, it was gathered either ad hoc or according to a principle. Tacit in this view was a theory of twofold progress: that of *science*, from empirical to theoretical, and that of (individual) *learning*, from naïve to scientific. But the deeper point was not developmental at all but rather transcendental: the difference the "critical" Kant would articulate between a priori and a posteriori judgments. Overlapping this contrast of historical with principled knowledge was another, slightly different, distinction: between philosophy "for the schools" and philosophy "for the world."<sup>65</sup> Kant, as a teacher, insisted upon equipping students with an orientation in worldly affairs, with what he came to call "pragmatic anthropology."<sup>66</sup> Here, historical knowledge needed to unfold for a long time, both in exposition and in assimilation, before any system would likely come on offer.

But there is a second, and ultimately perhaps far more pertinent, sense of *history* in Kant's thought, namely, as itself an important *theoretical concept* for natural science. Here, Kant was a pioneer, seeking to mutate the traditional, descriptive notion of "natural history" into a new theoretical awareness of the *developmental* character of the physical world. This was the major thrust of his early work *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), and of his important defense and reformulation of the thought of the comte de Buffon on species in his first essay on the idea of race (1775–8).<sup>67</sup> Herder was profoundly shaped, as we

Zinman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), 75–96; Massimo Mori, "Aufklärung und Kritizismus in Kants Geschichtsphilosophie," *Aufklärung* 5 (1990): 81–102; Rudolf Makkreel, "Differentiating Dogmatic, Regulative, and Reflective Approaches to History in Kant," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, Memphis, 1995, ed. Hoke Robinson (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 1:123–37.

<sup>64</sup> Helmut Holzhey notes: "The concept of history encompassed . . . in addition to literary experience secondhand also actual empiricism, sensual experience [*die eigentliche Empirie, die sinnliche Erfahrung*]." Holzhey, "Philosophie als Eklektik," *Studia Leibnitiana* 15 (1983): 19–29, citing 28. See, above all, Arno Seifert, *Cognitio historica: Die Geschichte als Namengeberin der frühneuzeitlichen Empirie* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1976).

<sup>65</sup> See Kant's announcements of his courses in physical geography and, eventually, in anthropology, as explicitly aimed at philosophy for the world: Ak 2:1–12, 309–12; Ak 9:21–4, 157–8.

<sup>66</sup> Thus, when Kant finally published his anthropology lectures he gave them the title *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, and he explained the point in the opening passage of that work: "Physiological knowledge of man aims at the investigation of what Nature makes of man, whereas pragmatic knowledge of man aims at what man makes, can, or should make of himself as a freely acting being" (Ak 7:119; trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978], 3).

<sup>67</sup> Kant, "Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen," Ak 2:427–44. See Raphaël Lagier, *Les races humaines selon Kant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), and Phillip Sloan, "Kant

have noted, by his exposure to this notion of history and to the implicit *continuity* of its conceptual efficacy from nature to (human) history.<sup>68</sup>

How did Kant's philosophy of history relate to the mainstream view that proliferated in the second half of the eighteenth century and that Herder so vehemently opposed? Kant reached most of the skeptical and ironic conclusions about history that I have characterized as typical of the Enlightenment in general. History of mankind, accordingly, did not seem to him a particularly important domain of thought or inquiry, and it played little role in his own work, except for some short but influential essays articulating his alternative stance on the issues Herder had adumbrated in his magnum opus.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the most famous of these is the essay entitled "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (1784). Kant insisted upon the philosophical scandal and ethical dilemma posed by the irrationality and suffering revealed in the historical record. There was an urgent philosophical need to retrieve man from despair before that record. As he put it:

It is hard to suppress a certain disgust when contemplating men's action upon the world stage. For one finds, in spite of apparent wisdom in detail that everything, taken as a

on the History of Nature: The Ambiguous Heritage of the Critical Philosophy for Natural History," *Studies in History and Philosophy of the Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37 (2006): 627–48, for the important claim that Kant weakened his commitment to this idea of natural history with the development of his critical philosophy.

<sup>68</sup> This is what Rudolf Haym meant when he claimed famously that Herder remained all his life a "Kantian of the year 1765." Haym, *Herder, nach seinem Leben und seinem Werk*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1885), 1:55. As Frederick Beiser puts it: "Herder approved of Kant's radical naturalism and only wanted to extend it. Kant's suggestion in his treatise that humans too are subject to a natural history and explicable in naturalistic terms proved to be especially fruitful for the young Herder. This suggestion became the guiding assumption behind his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. The aim of the *Ideen* is simply to apply Kant's naturalism to the sphere of history itself. The *Ideen* would be a natural history of humans as the *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte* is a natural history of the heavens. Herder saw history as subject to the same natural laws as the physical universe." Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 194.

<sup>69</sup> Kant's "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent" appeared in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in November 1784. The first part of his review of Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* appeared in the *Allgemeine Litterarische Zeitung* of Jena in January 1785. His rebuttal to the defense of Herder by Karl Reinhold in the *Teutscher Merkur* (February 1785) followed in the March 1785 issue of the *Allgemeine Litterarische Zeitung*: Kant, "Erinnerungen des Recensenten der Herderschen Ideen über ein im Februar des Teutschen Merkur gegen diese Recension gerichtetes Schreiben" (1785), Ak 8:56–8. Herder's second volume of *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* appeared in April 1785, and Kant's review of that part followed in the *Allgemeine Litterarische Zeitung* in November 1785. In that same month in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* appeared Kant's "Determination of the Concept of a Human Race" ("Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace," Ak 8:89–106). Manfred Kuehn notes this essay "was, at least in part, an answer to Herder" (Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 298). "Conjectural Beginnings of the Human Race" appeared in 1786 (Ak 8:107–23). In the 1790s Kant pursued these matters, especially in *Perpetual Peace* (1795; Ak 8:341–86), but also in "The End of All Things" (1794; Ak 7:325–40) and "The Old Question Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?" (1798; Ak 7:77–94).



whole, is interwoven with stupidity, childish vanity, often with childish viciousness and destructiveness. In the end, one does not know what kind of conception one should have of our species which is so conceited about its superior qualities. Since the philosopher must assume that men have a flexible purpose of their own, it is left to him to attempt to discover an end of nature in this senseless march of human events.<sup>70</sup>

The philosophical burden history imposed, then, was not a matter of the techniques of interpretation to be applied to particular events – the domain of the empirical historian – but rather the effort to find some overarching meaning or sense in the whole panorama, to escape the dizzying and nauseating sense of human folly:

History allows one to hope that if it examines the free exercise of human will *on a large scale*, it will be able to discover a regular progression among freely willed actions. Thus (it is to be hoped) that what appears to be complicated and accidental in individuals, may yet be understood as a steady, progressive, though slow, evolution of the original endowments of the entire species. . . . Individual human beings and even whole nations think little about the fact, since while each pursues its own aim in its own way and one often contrary to another, they are proceeding unnoticed, as by a guiding thread, according to an aim of nature, which is unknown to them, and are laboring at its promotion, although even if it were to become known to them it would matter little to them.<sup>71</sup>

Here, in germ, is the speculative project in philosophy of history, as it would be carried to its ultimate conclusion by Hegel and Marx.

Kant explained his “Idea for a Universal History” as occasioned by a short notice in the *Gothaische Gelehrte Zeitung*, “based on my conversation with a scholar who was traveling through [Königsberg].”<sup>72</sup> The notice maintained that “a favorite idea of Professor Kant is that the ultimate purpose of the human race is to achieve the most perfect civic constitution, and he wishes that a philosophical historian might undertake to give us a history of humanity from that point of view.”<sup>73</sup> Kant produced the essay in order that this “favorite idea” could be properly understood. For Kant, the essential point of the philosophy of history is *teleological*: the end or purpose of history as a whole. And, in fact, that end, which the commentator encapsulated as “the most perfect civic constitution,” needed to be grasped as a *moral*, not simply a political end, and one with which Kant was prepared to link very powerful traditional ideals: “the kingdom of God on

<sup>70</sup> Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” (Ak 8:15–32), trans. in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 41–54, citing 17–18 (trans. 42, amended).

<sup>71</sup> Kant, “Idea,” Ak 8:17; trans. in *Political Writings*, 41.

<sup>72</sup> Kant, “Idea,” Ak 8:15; trans. in *Political Writings*, 41n.

<sup>73</sup> Lewis W. Beck, ed., *Kant on History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 11n.

earth” and “the highest good.”<sup>74</sup> For Kant, it was not *happiness* – for him, a vacuous “ideal” postulated by reason to approximate satisfactions of the body – but *worthiness* grounded in virtue (the highest good) that represented the goal of human life.<sup>75</sup> But to posit such a goal or destiny of mankind, even as an idea, was to raise two thorny issues: First, what was the nature of the human species that warranted this claim about its collective history? And, second, what justice did this fulfillment of the species in the end do its individual members in the interval? One can be especially adamant here since, as Kant made so splendidly clear in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), no individual human being, as a rational end-in-itself, could serve merely as a means, yet the fulfillment of Kant’s teleological view of history would seem to situate individual humans as means to the species-end.<sup>76</sup>

While actual history must answer to “criteria quite different from those derived merely from the philosophy of nature,” Kant avows, the *first* steps of human freedom *can* be surmised, along lines that take inspiration from Rousseau and play along with the Genesis narrative.<sup>77</sup> On this conjecture, reason and imagination originally must have interacted to trigger human awareness that unlike all other animals man was not constrained by instinct. The emergence of reason enabled man to “finagle [*chikanieren*] with the voice of nature.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, “man soon discovered that the sexual stimulus, which in the case of animals is based merely on a transient and largely periodic urge, could in his case be prolonged and even increased by means of the imagination.”<sup>79</sup> But freedom of choice under the stirrings of reason and imagination inevitably generated “a whole host of superfluous or even unnatural inclinations.”<sup>80</sup> This sudden expansion of possibilities came without the secure understanding of their implied costs. Through such misadventures with appetites for food and sex, human self-awareness did achieve some ability to anticipate the future, to plan, and to pursue projects in a manner decisively

<sup>74</sup> On Kant’s philosophy of history and the highest good, see: Walter Brugger, “Kant und das höchste Gut,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 18 (1964): 50–61; Klaus Düsing, *Die Teleologie in Kants Weltbegriff* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1968); Düsing, “Das Problem des höchsten Gutes in Kants praktischer Philosophie,” *Kant-Studien* 62 (1971): 5–42; Thomas Auxter, *Kant’s Moral Teleology* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1982); Gerhard Krämling, “Das höchste Gut als mögliche Welt,” *Kant-Studien* 77 (1986): 272–88; Sharon Anderson-Gold, “Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth: The Highest Good as a Social Goal,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1986): 23–32; Andrews Reath, “Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (1988): 593–619.

<sup>75</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Ak 5:429–36; trans. W. S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 84; *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak 5:37; trans. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 38.

<sup>76</sup> Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 4:385–464; trans. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959); Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” Ak 8:20, trans. in *Political Writings*, 44.

<sup>77</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings of the Human Race,” Ak 8:109; trans. in *Political Writings*, 221.

<sup>78</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:112; trans. in *Political Writings*, 224.

<sup>79</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:112; trans. in *Political Writings*, 224.

<sup>80</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:111; trans. in *Political Writings*, 223.

beyond other animals – indeed, to regard the rest of creation merely as “means and instruments to be used at will for the attainment of whatever ends he pleased.”<sup>81</sup> But it also brought on anxiety of failure, anticipation of suffering, and ultimately the dread of death. All this evoked a need for the assistance and esteem of others (the essential impetus behind “sociability” for Kant), and ultimately the discovery of a moral calling: “the destiny of his species ... *progress toward perfection*.”<sup>82</sup>

Progress made sense, Kant suggested, only as a *species* destiny. From the individual vantage, not only was the first adventure with free choice mostly misfortune, so too would all succeeding adventures be at the individual level. For Kant this “fall,” this “loss,” the individual had to blame solely upon himself.<sup>83</sup> As Kant expressed it: “The history of *nature* begins with goodness, for it is the *work of God*; but the history of human *freedom* begins with evil, for it is the *work of man*.”<sup>84</sup> Kant argues that human reason must learn how to be efficacious in the world: it proceeds by trial and error toward the cumulation of cultural knowledge. But no individual can see such a complex trial-and-error endeavor to its end; thus only in the *species* can reason demonstrate its efficacy. Still, Kant is confident that there is a providential cunning in nature, whereby it forces this long march of human cultural maturation “through many generations,” according to which man will generate his own skills. It is patent to Kant that the goal of such a protracted retraining cannot be human happiness, for that instinct would from the outset have been more efficient. Instead, nature seems to have been “more concerned about his rational *self-esteem* than about his well-being.” The mechanism of this cunning of nature is “unsociable sociability,” the simultaneous need for others and resentment of their presence and demands. Mutual resistance is precisely what awakens human capabilities; thus mankind advances from “crudity toward culture.” Crucially, Kant professes that a “rude natural predisposition” for morality will evolve into “determinate practical principles,” that a “*pathologically* compelled agreement to form a society” will turn into a “*moral whole*.” Thus, Kant concludes, cultural achievement is the fruit of unsociability. Until it attains the moral whole, Kant maintains, “the human being is an *animal* which, when it lives among others of its species, *has need of a master*.” The only legitimate master could be humankind itself, but that constituted a very difficult problem, since “out of such crooked wood as the human being is made, nothing entirely straight can be fabricated.” It would take a combination of the right theoretical conception of a moral constitution, plus a lot of practical experience and goodwill. Kant acknowledges that these are difficult to find together, and hence he projects such a resolution far off into the

<sup>81</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:115; trans. in *Political Writings*, 225.

<sup>82</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:115; trans. in *Political Writings*, 226–7.

<sup>83</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:115; trans. in *Political Writings*, 226–7.

<sup>84</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:115; trans. in *Political Writings*, 226–7.

future, though clearly the moment of Enlightenment – his moment – suffices for discerning the overall scheme of the future.<sup>85</sup>

Kant pointed out that individuals faced three particular quandaries in historical experience. First, they experienced the frustration of achieving sexual maturity, with its attendant desires, long before the social maturity a civilized society required for fulfillment of those desires. Kant somehow believed that the achievement of a proper civil society (in the indefinite future) would assuage this.<sup>86</sup> Freud has the better argument on this score, I fear.<sup>87</sup> Then, too, individuals faced the thwarting of their ambitions by the brevity of life. And, finally, they confronted civil inequalities. Yet Kant notoriously insisted upon the positive role of “unsocial sociability” as a goad to progress.<sup>88</sup> Inequality, Kant reasserted here, was an “abundant source of so much evil but also of everything [!] good.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, that signal evil, *war* – or rather the anticipation of it – proves indispensable for the advancement of civilization. The risk of war induces states to promote social freedom in order to amass resources: “there can be no wealth-producing activity without freedom,” Kant stoutly affirms.<sup>90</sup> Preparation for war instills discipline and achieves progress through rivalry, and thus it is altogether to be preferred over the stultifying stability evinced by the universal empire of China or the fatuous complacency of the South Sea Islanders.<sup>91</sup> Kant’s ultimately racist Eurocentrism, stated blatantly elsewhere, rises near the surface here.<sup>92</sup> Yet all this – and even the “glittering misery of the towns,” where city women ply seductive arts beyond the ken of their rural sisters, and a general decadence derails the progress of the species – all this will nonetheless bring mankind *somehow* to an “ethical commonwealth.”<sup>93</sup> Such was Kant’s teleological confidence.

Kant believed the deep discontents that Rousseau had associated with man’s departure from the state of nature could be transfigured into a learning experience that transmuted individual failure into species hope. A “morally useful [philosophy of] history” must maintain such a position, lest thoughtful souls despair of Providence on the long road to the promised land and conceive history as a meaningless horror.<sup>94</sup> Kant’s philosophical teleology thus fulfilled Voltaire’s

<sup>85</sup> Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” Propositions 3–6, Ak 8:19–23; trans. in *Political Writings*, 43–7 amended.

<sup>86</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:116–17n; trans. in *Political Writings*, 228n.

<sup>87</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989).

<sup>88</sup> The phrase “unsocial sociability” is to be found as well in “Idea for a Universal History,” Ak 8:20.

<sup>89</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:119; trans. in *Political Writings*, 230.

<sup>90</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:120; trans. in *Political Writings*, 231.

<sup>91</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:121; trans. in *Political Writings*, 232–3.

<sup>92</sup> See Mark Larrimore, “Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the ‘Races,’” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, suppl. 25 (1999): 99–125.

<sup>93</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:120; trans. in *Political Writings*, 231.

<sup>94</sup> Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings,” Ak 8:120–1; trans. in *Political Writings*, 231–3.

program for philosophical history. Having mustered even Rousseau's best arguments under the Voltairean aegis, Kant felt certain he had the last word (especially versus Herder).<sup>95</sup>

Kant's philosophical judgments about the human condition resulted in a strikingly harsh tension between rational obligation and human happiness, species progress and individual tragedy. For many who made a diligent study of his great philosophical writings, the dualism into which Kant seemed to plunge them was insupportable, and the ideas of reason and of history that he propounded seemed in desperate need of reconciliation on both moral and aesthetic grounds. As a result, and in response to the urgent historical problem of finding some valid meaning, over against the palpable contradictions into which modern "progress" seemed to be leading mankind as the French Revolution took its bloody course, Friedrich Schiller composed his extremely influential manifesto, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1795), at the heart of which was a passionate plea for a new vision of human historical experience:

Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge. . . .

But can man really be destined to miss himself for the sake of any purpose whatsoever? Should Nature, for the sake of her own purposes, be able to rob us of a completeness which Reason, for the sake of hers, enjoins upon us? It must, therefore, be wrong if the cultivation of individual powers involves the sacrifice of wholeness. Or rather, however much the law of Nature tends in that direction, it must be open to us to restore by means of a higher Art the totality of our nature which the arts themselves have destroyed.<sup>96</sup>

In this *Sixth Letter*, Schiller responded directly to Kant's "Idea for a Universal History" and set the stage for the great writings of Hegel and Marx on the meaning of history.

#### GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL

Herder published his two great works in the philosophy of history in 1774 and the 1780s; Kant published his flurry of essays and reviews in the mid-1780s, followed

<sup>95</sup> See my "Stealing Herder's Thunder: Kant's Debunking of Herder on History in 'Conjectural Beginning of the Human Race,'" in *Immanuel Kant: Deutscher Professor und Weltphilosoph* [Immanuel Kant: German professor and world-philosopher], eds. Günter Lottes and Uwe Steiner (Saarbrücken: Wehrhahn, 2007), 43–72.

<sup>96</sup> F. Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, eds. E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), Sixth Letter, 31–43.

by elaborations in the wake of the French Revolution in the mid- to late 1790s. Hegel did not give his lectures on the philosophy of history until the 1820s. A watershed of historical developments thus lay between them: the entire epoch of the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the reactionary settlement of the Congress of Vienna. The impact of this historical experience on Hegel and others of his generation was fundamental. As Theodor Ziolkowski has contended, it rendered all disciplines of human inquiry in its aftermath distinctly historicist: Clio became the muse for all faculties.<sup>97</sup> For no one was this more the case than for Hegel, without question the greatest speculative philosopher of history in the modern epoch.

For all the separation in time and experience between Hegel and his predecessors, Herder and Kant, it remains that he is their direct heir, that he takes up and advances the decisive concerns with philosophy of history that animated each of them. From Kant, Hegel took the concern for redemptive totality, for finding a “meaning” in the sweep and especially against the heartbreak of history. Thus, famously, Hegel wrote: “in contemplating history as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed, a question necessarily arises: To what principle, to what final purpose, have these monstrous sacrifices been offered?”<sup>98</sup> Hegel proposed to be that “philosophical historian” for whom Kant’s brief “Idea” had sent forth the call. The difference Kant posited between his own interest and aptitude and that of the “philosophical historian,” who could really carry out the task, was precisely a rich and animated familiarity with historical developments in themselves, something Kant neither had nor wanted. Hegel, however, from his earliest school days had such an interest, and in his great philosophical system, the intricacy and importance of historical considerations were omnipresent.<sup>99</sup> Here, the connection with Herder seems to have been central, though it has rarely been emphasized except by Charles Taylor.<sup>100</sup> Hegel presumed one would “want to re-live the life of nations and enter into their spirit.”<sup>101</sup> That is the legacy

<sup>97</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, *Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>98</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in *Werke: Theorieerkaufgabe*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970–) [henceforth *Werke*, cited by volume and page numbers], 12:35; trans. in Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. R. Hartman (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), 27.

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and the classic Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. Allen Bloom (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969).

<sup>100</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 3–50; Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” in *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, eds. E. Margalit and A. Margalit (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 40–63, 217–19.

<sup>101</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, *Werke* 12:13, trans. in *Reason in History*, 5.

of Herder's approach to history: one could not imagine Kant's expressing such a concern. But the point, as Taylor and Isaiah Berlin have made clear, is not simply that Herder had an antiquarian fancy for vanished tribes and scribes, but that he (and Hegel emphatically after him) found in the concrete historical experience of individuals and communities vital evidence for the *expressive realization* of humanity (or spirit).<sup>102</sup>

For Kant, in keeping with his subordination of historical considerations to practical reason and its moral mandate, philosophy of history was about a *project*. He organized the problem of history into a series of tasks or phases of that project, and hence history had a clear *telos*. The task was to realize an ethical community in this world, to establish the "Kingdom of God" on earth. Within that *moral* project, there was a distinct *political* project: the establishment of "republican constitutions" within individual communities and, as the necessary environment for their viability, of a "perpetual peace" among states governed by a similar respect for universal right. For Hegel, history is ultimately about an *insight*: the recognition that history is the achievement – literally the self-actualization – of human freedom, by the force of reason. The actualization of freedom is, to be sure, also a matter of institutionalization: Hegel shares Kant's concern for political organization, though their models differ widely. But the *telos* of history, from the vantage of philosophy of history, is a matter of self-recognition of reason as constitutive of the (historical) world. It would be this ultimately contemplative rather than active dimension of Hegel's philosophy of history that would goad Marx.

To grasp Hegel's concrete philosophy of history, it is important to situate it with reference to the practice of history in an even more explicit manner than we have done with Herder and Kant. This is true in two crucial senses. First, Hegel's philosophy of history is a philosophy of *historical consciousness*, not of everything that has befallen humans since the dawn of the species. While we may not be very content with the exclusions from his consideration that this entailed, it is central to a grasp of his method and meaning.<sup>103</sup> What Hegel sought is a history of *spirit*, and spirit simply is self-conscious rationality. Without such self-consciousness, Hegel averred, there could be no history, and peoples who had not yet attained

<sup>102</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 50; Isaiah Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment," originally in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Earl Wasserman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965); reprinted in Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), 359–434.

<sup>103</sup> Hegel does not believe that Africa or the Americas or, for that matter, much of Central Asia or any of what is revealingly still called "prehistory" has any part in his narrative. The outrage of a new, politically correct "world historical" view over Hegel's Eurocentrism and racism is at the center of much contemporary disparagement of Hegel and of his project of a universal philosophical history. Yet it is noteworthy that instead of *abandoning* such "universal" or world history, the impetus of current historiography is to attempt to do it in a more comprehensive and simultaneously democratically inclusive manner.

a cultural level entailing self-consciousness remained at the level of mere *nature*, not yet *history*, and had no place in his account. History, Hegel asserted, concerns “peoples who knew who they were and what they wanted.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, “the objects of our consideration are peoples who have organized themselves rationally. In world history only those peoples that form states can come to our notice.”<sup>105</sup>

Second, Hegel formulated an explicit dialectical relation between “philosophical history” and other forms of historical consciousness, including disciplinary history (which is what he meant by “reflective history” in its various forms).<sup>106</sup> Historical consciousness begins, then, with “original history,” the self-conscious articulation of a present moment by a participant. There Hegel could detect the presence of spirit. More specifically, “the spirit of the author and that of the actions he relates are one and the same.”<sup>107</sup> That makes the evidence of this source indispensable for a historical understanding of that moment and people, but it does not make it sufficient. This incites “reflective history,” that is, retrospective, disciplinary history. Recognition of the “partiality” of the “original” or primary source motivates a historian of a later epoch to seek to supplement that account with background and perspectives that situate and delimit the claims it made, raising such a history from the particular to a “universal,” ideally *complete* account. This “negation” is dialectical in the precise sense of Hegelian logic, because its limitation of a claim is also an augmentation of the possible knowledge that the claim inaugurated. Reflective history was a demanding cognitive pursuit, as Hegel conceived it. “Only the thorough, free, and comprehensive insight into situations and the deep understanding of their idea ... can make reflections true and interesting.”<sup>108</sup> He offered Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* as exemplary.

<sup>104</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:12; trans. in *Reason in History*, 3.

<sup>105</sup> Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte: Einleitung in die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, [auf Grund des aufbehaltenen handschriftlichen Materials neu herausgeben von Georg Lasson; zweite, durchgesehene und um einen Nachtrag vermehrte Auflage], in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Georg Lasson (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1920) [hereafter Lasson, cited by volume and page number], 8:92; trans. in *Reason in History*, 51.

<sup>106</sup> For making this aspect of Hegel’s philosophy of history clear and important I thank George Dennis O’Brien, *Hegel on Reason and History: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). See also Burleigh T. Wilkins, *Hegel’s Philosophy of History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974); Jean Hyppolyte, *Introduction to Hegel’s Philosophy of History* (1948), trans. Bond Harris and Jacqueline Bouchard (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Robert Parker, ed., *History and System: Hegel’s Philosophy of History* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1984); Hans Fulda, “Geschichte, Weltgeist, und Weltgeschichte bei Hegel,” *Annalen der Internationalen Gesellschaft für dialektische Philosophie – Societas Hegeliana* 2 (1986): 58–105; Shaun Gallagher, ed., *Hegel, History and Interpretation* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997); Luc Ferry, *Political Philosophy 2: The System of Philosophy of History*, trans. F. Philip (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>107</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:12; trans. in *Reason in History*, 4.

<sup>108</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:18; trans. in *Reason in History*, 8.



The problem for this “reflective history,” implied by its very designation, is that the critique of the partiality of the original source inevitably carries over to that of the reflective historian, who must recognize the situatedness of his own revisionism, its groundedness in the spirit of his own time. To take up such historical inquiry presupposes some driving interest in the historian’s own time and self-consciousness, which is what Hegel takes as the meaning of “pragmatic history.” Thus this disciplinary history becomes increasingly self-conscious and self-critical, evolving into what Hegel calls, appropriately enough, “critical history,” the history of historiography. The question arises, in this reflective regress, whether a situated historian can ever attain an adequate knowledge of the original spirit, ever penetrate to that “deep understanding of [its] idea” that alone warrants disciplinary historical inquiry. Hegel holds out hope for this by considering a final form of “reflective history,” which he terms *Spezialgeschichte*, meaning the history of a particular form of spiritual expression within or across individual peoples, such as the history of art, or religion, or philosophy. Such historical accounts can reconstruct “more than the merely external thread or order of events and actions,” attaining “their internal, guiding soul.”<sup>109</sup> To find this “internal, guiding soul” is the highest ideal of all disciplinary history.<sup>110</sup> How is it possible? Hegel answers: “The principle of *development* implies ... that it is based on an inner principle, a presupposed potentiality.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, there is a *philosophical* presupposition at the ground of the best and highest form of disciplinary history, of which its practitioners, however, are not fully cognizant. To make explicit the tacit principle that warrants historical reconstruction is to advance, at last, to *philosophical* history, to the philosophy of history. Such a history will recognize not merely the coherence of “special” histories – of art or religion or philosophy – but the coherence of the *whole* – of history-in-the-singular – as the increasingly self-conscious expression of spirit over time.<sup>112</sup>

Still, philosophy and history are not identical pursuits, even for Hegel, and tension from the vantage of disciplinary history arises over the apparently “a priori” character of philosophy’s intervention. “In history, thinking is subordinate to the data of reality, which latter serve as guide and basis for historians. Philosophy, on the other hand, allegedly produces its own ideas out of speculation, without

<sup>109</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:19, trans. in *Reason in History*, 10.

<sup>110</sup> This principle of the “historical idea,” as something that develops across time yet preserves identity, is the decisive (metaphysical) principle of historicism. See the characterization of this principle in Frank Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 134, and his logical deconstruction of it in *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian’s Language* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983). The case against the logical/methodological fruitfulness of this idea is not altogether convincing, in my view.

<sup>111</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:75; trans. in *Reason in History*, 68.

<sup>112</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

regard to given data.... It seems that the method of philosophy would be in contradiction to the function of history."<sup>113</sup> This is what Hegel wishes both to acknowledge and resolve. The weak form of the reconciliation is to claim that "philosophy of history is nothing but the thoughtful contemplation of history."<sup>114</sup> That is, "at least one ought to have the firm and invincible faith that ... the world of intelligence and of self-conscious willing is not abandoned to mere chance."<sup>115</sup> It would be a self-defeating enterprise to try to understand history if one began from the premise that it could not make sense, that is, would reveal no order. In that sense, "to him who looks at the world rationally the world looks rationally back."<sup>116</sup> Moreover, Hegel suggests, even "the average and mediocre historian ... brings his categories with him and sees data through them."<sup>117</sup> It is this realization that galvanized the self-critical development of "reflective history" itself; hence it is not alien to history proper. No one should dispute, Hegel writes, that "history itself must be taken as it is; we have to proceed historically, empirically."<sup>118</sup> But naïve, that is, unself-conscious "empiricism" has already been discredited. Disciplinary historians already recognize that "the spirit that speaks out of the writer is quite different from that of the times he describes."<sup>119</sup> It remains to avoid the dead end whereby "this nullifies the past and makes the event present," that is, forecloses every reflection in its own present, a sort of historical solipsism.<sup>120</sup>

That is the challenge that philosophical history takes up, armed not only with an understanding of what has transpired in the constitution of the history of historiography (as yet another "special history") but with the *philosophical* key that resolves the apparent conflict: the sense for history's "internal, guiding soul," its "inner principle [or] presupposed potentiality," namely, the self-actualization of spirit. This is the strong claim Hegel proposes to advance, articulated in its most terse and provocative form in his *Philosophy of Right*: "the rational is actual and the actual is rational."<sup>121</sup> "The sole thought which philosophy brings to the treatment of history is the simple concept of *Reason*: that Reason is the law of the world and that, therefore, in world history, things have come about rationally."<sup>122</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:20; trans. in *Reason in History*, 10.

<sup>114</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:20; trans. in *Reason in History*, 10.

<sup>115</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:22; trans. in *Reason in History*, 12.

<sup>116</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:23; trans. in *Reason in History*, 13.

<sup>117</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:23; trans. in *Reason in History*, 13.

<sup>118</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:22; trans. in *Reason in History*, 12.

<sup>119</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:15; trans. in *Reason in History*, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:16; trans. in *Reason in History*, 7. Versions of such solipsism have arisen in both the "crisis of historicism" at the beginning and the postmodernist critique of history at the end of the twentieth century.

<sup>121</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 10, amended.

<sup>122</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:20; trans. in *Reason in History*, 11.

There is a deep homology between the structure and process of reason and the structure and process of the world. Now, it had long since become commonplace to accept that the *natural* world demonstrated rationality. The offense to Enlightenment understanding was that the *human* world, the world of ostensibly rational agents, appeared to lack rationality. That was mistaken, Hegel argued, and on two levels. First, the rationality of nature was an imperfect and incomplete instantiation of reason. It was unself-conscious. But, second, it was also, in his view, ultimately static. Things in nature instantiated the same law, without revision, cycle through cycle across time. But things were altogether different in the real home of reason, in the *human* world, for there, the essential thing was *real change*, development, and the character of that real change was precisely the advancing achievement of self-consciousness by rational agents: *freedom*. Whereas “it is an insight of speculative philosophy that Freedom is the sole truth of Spirit,” Hegel elaborates, “it may be said that world history is the exhibition of spirit striving to attain knowledge of its own nature.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, “world history begins its *general aim* – to realize the idea of Spirit – only in an implicit form (*an sich*), namely, as Nature – as an innermost, unconscious instinct. And the whole business of history ... is to bring it into consciousness.”<sup>124</sup> Simply, “world history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom.”<sup>125</sup> Famously, Hegel follows Herder in constructing a narrative of history that begins in a static Asia and comes alive as it moves to the West: “the Orientals knew only that *one* is free, the Greeks and the Romans that *some* are free, while we know that *all* men absolutely, that is, as men, are free.”<sup>126</sup> These were, for Hegel, “the natural divisions of world history.”<sup>127</sup>

To be sure, to ordinary consciousness, and even to the skilled “reflective” historian, this pervasive rationality may not be immediately forthcoming from the experience of history. What is first apparent to the historian is that human conduct is passionate and partisan. That is no misunderstanding. Indeed, “*nothing great in the world* has been accomplished without passion.”<sup>128</sup> But the tragic aspect is that such passion also results in tremendous violence and destruction – “even – rather we might say *especially* – with *good* designs and righteous aims.” Finding meaning in all this loss is the challenge of philosophy of history. It must see not only the passions but also a rationality that moves in and through them. Because human beings are intelligent, not merely passionate beings, human purposes are

<sup>123</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:30; trans. in *Reason in History*, 22–3.

<sup>124</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:39–40; trans. in *Reason in History*, 30.

<sup>125</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:32; trans. in *Reason in History*, 24.

<sup>126</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:32; trans. in *Reason in History*, 24.

<sup>127</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:32; trans. in *Reason in History*, 24.

<sup>128</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:38; trans. in *Reason in History*, 29.

interwoven with rational ideals. Passion and reason are to each other as “warp and woof.”<sup>129</sup> Humans follow out their personal intention, “but something more is thereby accomplished, which is latent in the action though not present in their consciousness and not included in their design.”<sup>130</sup> Such “unintended consequences” had long since been a special concern of historical accounting, and it became explicit in historical theory with at least the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>131</sup> Hegel elevated such “inadvertency” to immanent order, to his famous *List der Vernunft*, or “cunning of reason.”<sup>132</sup> In the dynamic of historical development, this “cunning of reason” uses the human passions for its own purposes, leaving the individual actors to pay the price.<sup>133</sup>

This is instantiated above all in those figures Hegel dubs “world-historical individuals.”<sup>134</sup> These figures respond to an impulse “still hidden beneath the surface but already knocking against the outer world.” They “see the very truth of their age and their world, the next genus, so to speak, which is already formed in the womb of time.”<sup>135</sup> Adopting this impulse for their own, they become the agents of the world spirit.<sup>136</sup> They embrace “momentous collisions between existing, acknowledged duties, laws, and rights and those possibilities which are adverse to this system, violate it, and even destroy its foundation and existence.”<sup>137</sup> Ruthlessness is the defining trait of the world-historical individual, but “so mighty a figure must trample down many an innocent flower, crush to pieces many things in its path.”<sup>138</sup> But they also pay a steep price. “Their whole life was labor and trouble, their whole being was in their passion. Once their objective is attained, they fall off like empty hulls from the kernel.”<sup>139</sup>

In and through the actions of these individual persons, the *real* individuals in history also meet their fate. These real individuals in world history are peoples organized into states.<sup>140</sup> These determinate instantiations of world history arise, flourish, then perish. “The manifestation of Spirit is its actual self-determination ... in the form of states and individuals.”<sup>141</sup> World history marches through each such individuality as a stage “wherein it achieves its truth and the consciousness

<sup>129</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:28; trans. in *Reason in History*, 29.

<sup>130</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:43; trans. in *Reason in History*, 35.

<sup>131</sup> The most famous such consideration in the Scottish Enlightenment is, of course, Adam Smith’s idea of the “invisible Hand.”

<sup>132</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:49; trans. in *Reason in History*, 44.

<sup>133</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:49; trans. in *Reason in History*, 44.

<sup>134</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:45; trans. in *Reason in History*, 39.

<sup>135</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:46; trans. in *Reason in History*, 40.

<sup>136</sup> Lasson, 8:75, 79, trans. in *Reason in History*, 39, 41.

<sup>137</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:44–5; trans. in *Reason in History*, 39.

<sup>138</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:49; trans. in *Reason in History*, 43.

<sup>139</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:47; trans. in *Reason in History*, 41.

<sup>140</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:26; trans. in *Reason in History*, 15.

<sup>141</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 93; trans. in *Reason in History*, 51.

of itself.”<sup>142</sup> In and through the acts of world-historical individuals, “the existence of a national spirit is broken when it has used up and exhausted itself.”<sup>143</sup> Thus, “development is connected with the degradation, destruction, annihilation of the preceding mode of activity which the concept of the Spirit had evolved.”<sup>144</sup> This is the immanent dialectic, the cumulative development, that the *philosophical* historian sees and that provides the “internal soul” after which reflective historians tacitly model their accounts. “The principles of the national spirits are only moments of the one universal Spirit which through time elevates and completes itself into a self-comprehending *totality*.”<sup>145</sup>

There are few claims that have occasioned such controversy as Hegel’s claim that the state is the authentic individual in history. Hegel’s “statism” has been connected with his affirmation of the Prussian monarchy of his day and condemned not only as a conservative political ideology (which it may have been, in part) but as a totalitarian prescription for Western civilization (which it certainly was not).<sup>146</sup> Part of the concern arises from a willful misunderstanding of what Hegel meant by his idea of the state.<sup>147</sup> But another part is occasioned by skepticism about even the most generous construction of Hegel’s meaning.<sup>148</sup> Certainly, Hegel did not mean by his historical concept of the state simply the administrative center of power and violence in a population. He would have been more comfortable with the idea that his concept betokened the rule of law and its institutional expression, but even this notion of the *Rechtsstaat* does not encompass Hegel’s philosophical-historical idea of the state. Hegel realized that he was straining the conventional understanding:

This designation is ambiguous in that by “state” and “constitutional law” one usually means the simple political aspect as distinct from religion, science, and art. But when we speak of the manifestation of the spiritual we understand the term “state” in a more comprehensive sense . . . the spirit of a people . . . its consciousness of itself, of its own truth, its own essence, the spiritual powers which live and rule in it.<sup>149</sup>

His idea was that the state constituted a “moral whole,” a spiritual universal.

Hegel invokes an organicism similar to Herder’s to emphasize this primacy of the whole: “the state is not the abstract confronting the citizens; they are parts

<sup>142</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:73; trans. *Reason in History*, 67.

<sup>143</sup> Lasson, 8:74–5; trans. in *Reason in History*, 38.

<sup>144</sup> Lasson, 8:75, trans. in *Reason in History*, 39.

<sup>145</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:104–5; trans. in *Reason in History*, 95.

<sup>146</sup> See the discussion in Jon Stewart, ed., *The Hegel Myths and Legends* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 51–128.

<sup>147</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

<sup>148</sup> Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>149</sup> Lasson, 8:92; trans. in *Reason in History*, 52.

of it, like members of an organic body, where no member is end and none is means."<sup>150</sup> It is in this sense, Hegel argues, that "the state is the definite object of world history proper." Indeed, he dares to say, "the state is the divine Idea as it exists on earth," a line that Marx and much subsequent reception found unendurable.<sup>151</sup> The question is not simply about the iniquities of all historically actual states, but even more about the very possibility of so integral a community. What Hegel, following Herder, calls the "spirit of a people" or, in a phraseology that developed immediately out of Herder's context, the "culture of a nation," presumes a consistency of elements within a given historical community that subsequent scholarship has found extremely problematic.<sup>152</sup> Hegel, like Herder, went too far by our current standards in believing that "the constitution of a people is of the same substance, the same spirit as its art and philosophy, or at least its imagination, its thoughts, and its general culture – not to mention the additional, external influences of climate, neighbors, and global position."<sup>153</sup>

Whatever the controversy over Hegel's holistic conception of *individual* states or peoples, the greatest controversy has arisen over the claim that, in a phrase he adopted from Schiller, "the course of world history is the court of world justice," that is, that what emerges over the course of historical time is the fulfillment of spiritual actualization in the world.<sup>154</sup> Two sorts of objection are registered most frequently. First, there is theoretical outrage at the presumption to proclaim an "end of history," in the sense, not only of an ultimate goal for the process, but even of its attainment. Second, there is ethical outrage that *success* seems to be the ultimate test of *justice*, suggesting that "might makes right." While these are complex objections, they say as much about the sensibilities of their exponents as they do about Hegel's philosophy itself. First and most simply, Hegel nowhere suggested that history would in some sense *stop*, much less that it *had* stopped, in his own time and with his own insight.<sup>155</sup> What he suggested rather was that he had grasped what history was *about*, and in this sense how its "warp and woof"

<sup>150</sup> Lasson, 8:92; trans. in *Reason in History*, 52.

<sup>151</sup> Lasson, 8:91, trans. in *Reason in History*, 53.

<sup>152</sup> Margaret Archer, "The Myth of Cultural Integration," *British Journal of Sociology* 36 (1985): 333–53; Robert Brightman, "Forget Culture: Replacement, Transcendence, Relexification," *Cultural Anthropology* 10 (1995): 509–46; William Sewell, Jr., "The Concept(s) of Culture," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, eds. Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 35–61.

<sup>153</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:64–5; trans. in *Reason in History*, 59.

<sup>154</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Werke 7:503; Eng. trans., 216.

<sup>155</sup> See Stewart, *The Hegel Myths and Legends*, 181–236. These issues have generated new controversy in the "Hegelian" work of Francis Fukuyama: *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). See Kenneth Jensen, ed., *A Look at "The End of History"* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1990); Timothy Burns, ed., *After History? Francis Fukuyama and His Critics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994); Christopher Bertram and Andrew Chitty, eds., *Has History Ended? Fukuyama, Marx, Modernity* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994).

could be made to cohere in a *progressive*, that is, cumulative and more profound, developmental understanding: "The Spirit, devouring its worldly envelope, not only passes into another envelope, not only arises rejuvenated from the ashes of its embodiment, but it emerges from them exalted, transfigured, a purer Spirit."<sup>156</sup> Second, Hegel was not suspending the ethical or reducing it to the opportunistic. Hegel was not Machiavelli, and even Machiavelli may not deserve such a reading. But Hegel invited philosophers of history to face the terrible question of the "slaughter-bench" without being reduced to a pious shudder of impotence. He took seriously the call to seek some redemptive sense in all the chaos. To be sure, that may be harder for those of us haunted by the horrors of the past century, which seem to have lain waste forever to any hope of progress.<sup>157</sup>

What does it mean to "make sense of history" for Hegel? In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* he stated it clearly: "To judge a thing that has substance and solid worth is quite easy, to comprehend it is much harder, and to blend judgement and comprehension in a definitive description is the hardest thing of all."<sup>158</sup> On the one hand, one must *organize* – that is, apprehend or explain – the "chaos" (of passion, pain, change). On the other, one must *judge* – that is, evaluate and redeem – that chaos. It is necessary to plot it in comprehensible units, and it is necessary, having done so, to apply some retrospective judgment to the constituted narrative as a whole. This *retrospective* aspect needs to be stressed. Hegel is not in the least interested in scientific prediction. He is interested in philosophical comprehension. In one of his most famous passages, he wrote:

As the thought of the world, it [philosophy] appears only when actuality is already there cut and dried after its process of formation has been completed. . . . When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.<sup>159</sup>

Philosophy, then, can retrospectively comprehend history and find for it a redemptive meaning. Yet it must be said that this redemption is ultimately *only* conceptual. In the vantage of Absolute Spirit, it is true, the wise man may find solace and self-affirmation that bind him richly and fully to the fabric of the history of his species, yet the passion, the purpose, and the pain of individual lives retain all their particular tragedy.

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in 1807, gives a developmental account of the progress of spirit that, while not itself historical, is essential to a

<sup>156</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:98; trans. in *Reason in History*, 89.

<sup>157</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

<sup>158</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Werke 3:13; trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>159</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Werke 7:28; Eng. trans., 13.

grasp of Hegel's philosophy of history. Spirit is essentially self-referential, even as it is processual. Indeed, were we fully to grasp the relation between process and self-reference, we would have come very near to the heart of that other key Hegelian notion, dialectic. But let us settle for the simple notion that self-hood is learned, not in the sense that there is no original endowment, but that even this original endowment, as potential, only becomes real as it is actualized and discovered in oneself. Then we can map out the progress of self-discovery as a paradigm for the progress of understanding altogether, and we can see the contradictions, confusions, errors, and desolations of learning-to-be-a-person at so many stages on life's way, to use Kierkegaard's phrase. Within the aboriginal awareness of a given subject, the world is omnipresent and still not yet a world, because it is not yet grasped beyond its immediacy as presence. None of us can ever remember this stage in our personal development, if indeed it ever existed purely as such. But it is theoretically useful as a starting point precisely for its two-sided irony: the world in all its immediate fullness is utterly blank because no discriminations within it are accessible. And the self in all its immediate openness has no boundary between it and the world and hence is not yet a true self. Everything is present; nothing is grasped. It is only in its process of discrimination among the givens of the world that this consciousness that is implicitly a self begins its discovery of its own identity. That is how Hegel starts out the account.

Carving reality into crude and less crude configurations, this consciousness gradually begins to recognize certain elements in the very procedure it has almost unwittingly undertaken: first, it is active in the process of assimilating the world to its configurations, and has, in that measure, a freedom to configure. Yet that freedom is not unlimited. There is a stubborn resistance to the world when one wishes to proceed from rethinking it to remaking it. This resistance of the world to our will is the first intimation of the essential nature of subjectivity. When we have learned the world is not answerable to our whim, we learn that the world is not us, and by that very token we for the first time have a sense of ourselves. A baby learns only too slowly that crying does not always bring mother, that the world is not so easily answerable to our mere whim. But the learning goes far beyond that first harsh lesson in what Freud called, not unwisely, "the reality principle." Hegel calls the decisive fact that the world is not effortlessly at our disposal, the problem of labor. Recognizing that the world is not a mere extension of us, we have not thereby surrendered all hope of its conformity to our will. We must act. We must change the world. And though it is resistant, the world proves not immutable. But there is a further discovery in this experience of the world. Not only does one discover oneself in the very intractability of the not-self, but one also discovers the existence of other intentional and demanding beings in



the world, equally adamant to have it obey their imperatives. This constitutes the even more important problem of society.

In raising the problems of labor and society to prominence as problems of cognitive development or identity formation, Hegel advanced philosophy decisively toward a fusion with social theory. The two dimensions come together in the problem of freedom, that is, of reconciling the active subject with the limitations of concrete individual existence in the context of recalcitrant nature and other independent actors. It is in this context that Hegel carries philosophy forward from the Stoic notion of mental freedom, past the arbitrariness of skepticism, into the misery of the unhappy consciousness – all toward the one goal of centering the problem of authentic existence in the exercise of freedom in the real world of labor and society.

Perhaps the most famous passage of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is Hegel's characterization of the dialectical relation between master and slave. Each self desires this mastery of the world of its experience and encounters, as a consequence, the challenge of others. In the eyes of the other it sees itself a mere object, and this objectification is a form of death. This challenge is fundamental and unrelenting: each self considers its entire identity at stake. Only by forcing the other to be object can this threat be overcome; only by securing the submission of the other to the domination of self is its freedom secured. The conflict for mastery is a life and death struggle. Yet to destroy the other is no victory, because recognition of one's domination is lost when the other is destroyed. The self can only triumph if it can secure submission, not destruction of the other. And the irony and developmental impetus of this struggle are precisely that some other will, faced with the prospect of destruction, prefer submission to death. At that moment, the dialectic of master and slave reaches its climax. One individual has succeeded in obtaining the unilateral recognition of another, who has submitted to the former's will. As a token of this, the slave labors to secure for the master the fullest harvest from recalcitrant nature. The master no longer labors but merely gleans the fruits of the slave's labor. The slave has life, too precious to forsake even at the cost of freedom, and this life is labor, and struggle with the resistant earth. But here is the consummate irony of the dialectic: human life and experience can grow only in this struggle with reality. By winning, the master has in fact taken himself out of the developmental path, and only the slave has the prospect of further growth. The master withers, while the slave grows strong. The slave alone cultivates his latent humanity, and he alone carries forward the project of human self-realization.

The overthrow of the master is at the same time the overthrow of mere subjectivity and the assertion of a higher order of meaning, of Objective Spirit. Given that the categories of labor and society have already loomed so large in the characterization of human experience, it should not be surprising that the

sphere of objectivity should be the sphere of social relations and above all the domain of the pursuit of just political order. It is in the realm of Objective Spirit that individuals seek to establish universal norms and universal happiness: to find a way, having thrown over the arbitrary despotism of masters, to live together as laborers, but no longer as slaves. The whole human drama of politics and history offered a rich tapestry from which Hegel drew examples of the various efforts in this crucial sphere.

Hegel believed the question of social integration, of justice, was a perennial and essential concern of any and every human being, but he believed that there was inevitable alienation in the dialectic of labor: humans could never remake the real world in perfect accordance with their intentions. There was not world enough nor time. Still more sobering was his recognition that the dialectic of society offered no ultimate reconciliation either: the conflicts among men would never achieve perfect resolution. Neither at the level of the individual nor at the level of any particular society could the sought-for wholeness be achieved. Where, then, might it be sought? Hegel argued that there was only one dimension left, the whole history of man in the world. What could be consummated neither in the individual nor in the society might yet be reached in the species.

That prospect Hegel identified with Absolute Spirit. The term "Absolute Spirit" refers both to a metaphysical entity and to a process of discovery. Hegel believed that man had achieved three modes of relating to that prospect beyond either individual life or the particular fabric of a given society. The first of these was art. Through art the image of wholeness is evoked, and in the moment that art is present to consciousness, the world is transfigured and man is transposed into harmony. Yet art is only an epiphany. It is, as Stendhal put it, the *promise* of happiness, but in itself evanescent. The happiness that endures is other. The second mode of access to the ultimate is through religion. For Hegel, religions express, in a mystical or symbolic form, the true nature of reality. Religion represents an advance over art in the sustained quality of its vision of harmony, and in its ability to characterize the state and the value of blessedness. Yet religion sees as through a glass darkly, Hegel believed, while reason can formulate and grasp the ultimate in clear and comprehensive concepts. In absolute philosophy, Spirit at last confirms the truth as whole, and knowledge – as philosophical wisdom – as the ultimate salvation available to man.

It may be that the story of Objective Spirit's unfolding that Hegel lays out in his philosophy of history is too optimistic, but it should be remembered that for Hegel *every* instantiation of Objective Spirit must *fail* in some measure. The very determinacy of its instantiation, the very individuality of its accomplishment is its fatal *partiality* when viewed retrospectively from the standpoint of a more advanced spiritual order. And even in any given moment of Objective Spirit,

there are contradictions from which anguished participants can appeal only to a higher vantage, the insight of "Absolute Spirit" in art, religion, and philosophy. Absolute Spirit alone can appraise the limitations of all actualization and grasp its own essential character as restless action, overriding even the most "splendid and highly developed human life."<sup>160</sup> Thus, philosophy of history is itself a propaedeutic to the ultimate form of absolute philosophy, wherein we come to grips with the ferocious negativity of Spirit, its ability to advance only by conflict and destruction. This was Hegel's most emphatic motif, the discovery of the productivity of negation, the "Golgotha of the Spirit."<sup>161</sup> And it was why for Hegel, ultimately, contemplative insight took precedence over historical actualization. His philosophy was ultimately, a "theodicy, a justification of God.... Thus the evil in the world was to be comprehended and the thinking mind reconciled with it.... This reconciliation can only be attained through the recognition of the positive elements in which that negative element disappears as something subordinate and vanquished."<sup>162</sup> For some this seems only a sublime form of self-deception, verging on the ridiculous. For others, it is simply sublime.

#### KARL MARX

We cannot get closer to the essence of Marx as a philosopher of history than to evoke the most famous statement of his *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in a variety of ways; the point is to change it."<sup>163</sup> That is, what must be highlighted is the *ethical interest* in Marx's history: "historical consciousness as an instrument of human liberation."<sup>164</sup> The ethical totality that Hegel had articulated philosophically was that which Marx desired to realize as a concrete human community. Thus, he proposed to *prescribe the future* in accordance with the agenda of Condorcet and Kant. It is this that makes Marx the heir and the final executor of the grand tradition of philosophy of history, even if he must also be understood as the inaugurator of alternative

<sup>160</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:98; trans. in *Reason in History*, 88.

<sup>161</sup> Hegel, Preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Werke 3:36; Eng. trans., 19.

<sup>162</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Werke 12:28; trans. in *Reason in History*, 18.

<sup>163</sup> Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975-) [henceforth Marx, CW, cited by volume and page numbers], CW:5:5.

<sup>164</sup> Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 284. On Marx's philosophy of history, see especially M. M. Bober, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950); G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978). On Marx in general, see George Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); and Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

intellectual and political projects – historical sociology and socialist politics, most prominently.

When Hegel died in the cholera epidemic of 1831, Prussia was consolidating a starkly reactionary political system grounded in the unity of “throne and altar,” that is, authoritarian monarchy reinforced by an established church. The now religiously conservative Friedrich Schelling was summoned to the University of Berlin to dispel the legacy of his former friend and rival. It nevertheless persisted, split into two currents termed, respectively, “old” or “right” and “young” or “left” Hegelianism. Marx, as a student at the University of Berlin, was exposed to both wings but clearly identified with the second. As part of this “Young Hegelian” movement, he joined not only in contestation of the “throne-and-altar” regime in Prussia, but also in the reception of “utopian socialism” flowing into the Germanies from France, especially after the revolution of 1830. In particular, a powerful current of Saint-Simonianism entered radical circles in the Germanies, contributing substantially both to the literary-political opposition called “Young Germany” (e.g., Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Boerne, and Georg Büchner), and to the philosophical-political opposition of the “Young Hegelian” movement. A central feature of this moment was that critique of religion constituted a decisive part of the critique of politics.

The Young Hegelian movement began when D. F. Strauss, a young theologian, offered a very controversial biography of Christ in 1835. In that biography, Strauss did what had been latent in the whole theological movement of the Enlightenment: he rendered the figure whom orthodox Christians took to be divine into a teacher of human morality. Kant, among others, had reduced the doctrines of Christian religion into a set of moral precepts, but Strauss made Christ himself strictly human. The results were scandal and outrage. The orthodox Christian community persecuted Strauss, drove him from his university chair, and upheld the most literal sense of the sacred writ. But throughout Europe serious minds wrestled with the prospect that Christ might be no more than a teacher of virtue. George Eliot translated Strauss’s work into English, and Victorian intellectuals from Eliot to John Stuart Mill began to seek a secular alternative to Christianity as the foundation of their social and moral views. The line of thought they pursued was only a more genteel version of the one followed on the Continent: supplanting heaven with hope in social progress.

The first step was an intellectual one. Ludwig Feuerbach made it in his *Essence of Christianity* (1841). Feuerbach made the argument that religion took human ideals and aspirations and projected them onto some external being, whom it called “God,” to worship. All that was great and good in himself – love and justice, truth and beauty – man transferred to the divine and rendered himself the more abject by invidious contrast with it. Religion was in fact dehumanization.

This alienation arose, according to Feuerbach, out of each individual's insight that in himself he could not fully attain all those aspects of love and justice, truth and beauty that characterized the dignity of the human estate (what Herder had called *Humanität* and Hegel, *Geist*). Yet that infinity of which each individual felt incapable, he went on, was merely the sum of the attributes of mankind taken as a whole. For Feuerbach, in a far more literal way than for Hegel, man was God – at least, man taken in the historical totality of his species being.

The critique of religion in the Prussian context led naturally to the critique of political power and of political economy. From Feuerbach it was a short but a decisive step to Karl Marx, who initially identified his philosophical project as a Feuerbachian critique of Hegel. Famously, Marx contended that he found in Hegel a philosophy “standing on its head,” and his project was to set it properly upright, with its feet solidly on the ground.<sup>165</sup> What “old Hegelianism” celebrated as sublime spirituality, Marx wished to desubliminate into real life. Even Feuerbach remained too abstractly philosophical in his anthropological materialism, so that Marx had to challenge this residual idealism, leading to the famous thesis from which this discussion set out. This led Marx to turn toward a more hard-headed materialism – that is, back toward Enlightenment “science.”

Against idealism, Marx proposed a drastic revaluation of the spirituality and materiality of man. “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.” That is, “men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, and so on – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces.”<sup>166</sup> That was the definitive declaration of independence in Marx's “historical materialism.”

Still, Marx recognized his inheritance from Hegel and the idealist tradition of philosophy of history. It was in grasping history in terms of dialectics that Hegel seemed especially insightful to Marx:

The outstanding thing in Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its final outcome – that is, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle – is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-genesis of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the

<sup>165</sup> “To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea,’ he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea.’ With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. . . . [But] the mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.” Marx, “Afterword to *Capital*, vol. 1,” in Marx, CW 35:19.

<sup>166</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:37; *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of *labour* and comprehends objective man – true, because real man – as the outcome of man's *own labour*.<sup>167</sup>

It was not merely Hegel's idea of the process of development, but also his notion of a cumulative achievement of higher meaning – a goal or end of history – that Marx wished to derive from the idealist tradition of history and philosophy. Instead of Spirit, however, Marx wished to see real human fulfillment in society. The units to be conceived and redeemed were not the spirits of peoples, but rather social classes struggling over control of the means of production. With this frame of reference, Marx, like Hegel, believed he could do justice to the terrible empirical toll of suffering, pain, and injustice attested by the historical record but also discern a process of clarification, a trajectory to history, that led it toward a crisis and a resolution that he saw looming in the modern age.

One way to conceive Marx's departure from idealism is to juxtapose Hegel's philosophy of history to the "positivist" vision of Auguste Comte and to consider Marx's position as a "synthesis."<sup>168</sup> This makes sense at best only heuristically, that is, from our vantage, rather than intentionally, from his, for Marx made it clear he did not hold Comte's system in high esteem.<sup>169</sup> Yet the commonalities they shared are especially evident in the contrast with Hegelianism, and it is this heuristic that, alongside the obvious Saint-Simonian connection already mentioned, makes it expedient to devote a brief consideration to the philosophy of history of Comte.

Though a generation younger than Hegel, Comte is typically considered Hegel's counterpart in the development of speculative philosophy of history in the nineteenth century. As Mazlish observes, "Comte and Hegel appear to be one of those rare double stars which light up the horizon of thought together."<sup>170</sup> Frank Manuel, for example, notes (not without condescension) the "parallels between the two mammoth systematizations" and continues, "these philosophical dinosaurs stand revealed as belonging to the same species." Manuel discerns that their systems were "at once logics and philosophies of history."<sup>171</sup> Each followed out distinct national traditions of the discourse: Comte, the

<sup>167</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, CW 3:332–3; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 112.

<sup>168</sup> This is the position adopted by Bruce Mazlish in *The Riddle of History: The Great Speculators from Vico to Freud* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

<sup>169</sup> Marx read Comte's work only in 1866, whereupon he commented that "compared with Hegel it is wretched," as Bruce Mazlish has noted, *Riddle of History*, 223. The conjecture of any positive influence rather than parallelism lies in the propagation of Saint-Simonianism in Germany in the 1830s and 1840s, to which Comte contributed substantially and that Marx clearly absorbed in significant measure.

<sup>170</sup> Mazlish, *Riddle of History*, 183.

<sup>171</sup> Manuel, *Prophets of Paris*, 287.

eighteenth-century tradition of Turgot and Condorcet, supplemented by the direct influence of Saint-Simon and the cultural influence of the *Idéologues* and the counterrevolutionaries, Bonald and De Maistre. Hegel, as we have seen, pursued the line from Herder and Kant. Yet the story is not quite so linear, for there is a letter from Comte in 1824, in which he “writes of Herder as ‘*prédécesseur du Condorcet, mon prédécesseur immédiat*.’”<sup>172</sup> In that same year, Comte’s disciple, Gustave d’Eichthal, traveled to Germany and attended Hegel’s lectures. He presented a text of Comte to Hegel, who expressed some appreciation for it, along with some reservations. Comte was thrilled – as always – at any sign of recognition and immediately added Hegel to his list of allies.<sup>173</sup> But that was the limit of the intellectual intercourse between the two figures; their systems of philosophy of history were totally independent, and, as Mazlish observes, “their differences are more important than their likenesses.”<sup>174</sup> The most important difference was that Hegel had no interest in predicting the future, whereas that was Comte’s entire motivation and his essential conception of scientific procedure. What motivates considering them jointly is simply that “they find their synthesis in Karl Marx,” he continues.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, in his view, “Marx’s greatness ... was that he synthesizes the insights of Hegel and Comte.”<sup>176</sup>

From 1814 to 1816, Comte studied at the *École Polytechnique*, France’s premier institution for training in science and engineering, where he was exposed to such key mathematical physical scientists as Carnot, Monge, Lagrange, and Laplace. This training shaped Comte’s mind profoundly, such that the model of mathematical natural science became the source of all his future considerations. But there was a further element in this training, namely, what we would today call a starkly *technocratic* orientation: the conviction that “scientific” experts were called for to provide the social engineering necessary to reorder society. Thus Comte envisioned his project as the historical reconstruction of the triumph of modern natural science and the continuation of that development into a science of society, which he initially called “social physics” and eventually christened as “sociology.” On that scientific basis, specialized social engineers could organize a completely systematized society of the highest degree of order.

In 1817, Comte became the secretary and privileged disciple of Henri Saint-Simon. This close affiliation lasted until their bitter falling out in 1824. Saint-Simon’s proindustrial ideology and social utopianism seemed to fit perfectly the technocratic impulses of his young admirer, and they complemented each other

<sup>172</sup> F. A. Hayek, “Comte and Hegel,” *Measure: A Critical Journal* 2, no. 3 (1954): 324–41, citing 339n24.

<sup>173</sup> Hayek, “Comte and Hegel,” 326.

<sup>174</sup> Mazlish, *Riddle of History*, 184.

<sup>175</sup> Mazlish, *Riddle of History*, 185.

<sup>176</sup> Mazlish, *Riddle of History*, 223.

in that Saint-Simon emphasized industry while Comte emphasized science in their joint advocacy of a new scientific-industrial elite that would seize the future. After their bitter parting, enormous disputes about the influence of Saint-Simon on Comte's theory broke out. Comte's early text "Plan of the Scientific Operation Necessary for Reorganizing Society" (1822) clearly attests a strong affiliation.<sup>177</sup> But Comte's systematizing power and his concentration on the history and philosophy of science were clearly of a higher order than Saint-Simon's, and these were the essential features of his philosophy of history.

Comte coined the term "positivism" and gave it its two central theoretical dimensions: as an epistemology and as a philosophy of history. The epistemological premises of positivism – relentless phenomenalism, antimetaphysicalism, and unitarian hierarchy of knowledge – served as a powerful theoretical warrant for Comte's philosophy of history. His epistemology built upon Enlightenment thought, perhaps most centrally David Hume's combination of empiricism and skepticism. Thus, Comte maintained drastically the traditional empiricist stance that there could be nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses, and he drew the epistemological consequence that there could be no evidential warrant, no claim to validity, that did not trace the claim back to sensory data. Consequently, nothing was more odious to Comte than recourse to transcendent or metaphysical categories, that is, to anything that postulated the reality of what could not be confirmed by sensory observation. That was an unacceptably pre-scientific and obsolete approach to reality. Finally, Comte subscribed utterly to the view that all science fell under the authority of a unitary model and method, first established in the mathematical-physical sciences and destined to triumph in all the other sciences in turn. A complete social science, he predicted and indeed sought to actualize, would account for human affairs on the same positive methodological foundations and with the same exhaustive causal determinacy as had been achieved earlier in the natural sciences. As Mazlish summarizes, "for Comte history teaches us the general direction taken by the human development, and by so doing gives us scientific laws by which to discern the necessary shape of man's future progress."<sup>178</sup>

According to Comte's definitive formulation of the "law of three stages," human thought originally deployed theological structures to order the world of experience: everything from primitive animism to sophisticated monotheism, in the measure that it postulated a transcendent agency governing the behavior

<sup>177</sup> A. Comte, "Plan of the Scientific Operation Necessary for Reorganizing Society" (1822), reprinted in *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*, ed. Gertrud Lenzer (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 9–67. This early essay contains in embryo all the essential elements of Comte's complete system of the philosophy of history.

<sup>178</sup> Mazlish, *Riddle of History*, 210.



of the human environment, counted on this scheme as theological. Gradually, and differentially by content, human thought progressed from theological to metaphysical conceptions of the world. Immanent, but essential, properties *in* the world came to explain the nature and function *of* the world. Upon further consideration, however, these speculative entities proved inaccessible to critical appraisal. Finally, and again sequentially by field, human thought advanced to the ultimate stage of positive knowledge. This form was achieved first in mathematics and mathematical physical science in the seventeenth century, followed by chemistry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It would be achieved, Comte was confident, in biology and ultimately in the study of human conduct, which he dubbed "sociology."

The philosophy of history involved both a theory of the specific development of particular sciences as well as a theory of the overall advancement of the human race. As Mazlish has observed, "Comte is really interested in the sciences and their development," and he achieved "a history of the natural sciences ... unusually competent and impressive for his times." But he did so because "not only the sciences, ... but the human race itself goes through these three stages": that is, the history of science reveals the essential mechanism of the development of human history.<sup>179</sup> As Gertrud Lenzer summarizes and cites from the early "Plan" of 1822, "the development of civilization ... is nothing other than the 'development of the human mind,' from which results the 'increasing power of man over nature. In other words, the important elements of civilization are science, the fine arts, and industry,'" and "the relative developments of the sciences, fine arts, and industry determine the individual and collective actions of men, which in turn produce the corresponding social organization and social forces."<sup>180</sup>

Thus, sequential achievement of the positive stage by the hierarchy of sciences propelled the progress of the human race. To Comte, the pragmatic warrant for science was its incontestable and cumulative contribution to human flourishing. Positive science offered a more certain predictive grasp of reality, and, concomitantly, such knowledge provided utility in a Baconian sense: prediction was power. The conquest of ever new domains, ultimately the sphere of human conduct itself, by the methodology of positivism was both inevitable and welcome. For Comte "the coming into being of sociology [would] mark the final triumph of positivism."<sup>181</sup> As Gertrud Lenzer observes, "the ultimate aim of his system was

<sup>179</sup> Mazlish, *Riddle of History*, 196, 199.

<sup>180</sup> Lenzer, Introduction to *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, xxxvi–vii, drawing on Comte's essay of 1822.

<sup>181</sup> Anthony Giddens, "Positivism and Its Critics," in *A History of Sociological Analysis*, eds. T. B. Bottomore and Robert Nisbet (New York: Basic, 1978), 237–86, citing 238.

to bring about the end of history, the final systematization of individual and social life, of feeling, thought and activity.”<sup>182</sup>

Comte's major works, *Cours de philosophie positive* (6 vols., 1830–42) and *Système de politique positive* (4 vols., 1851–4), had a profound impact on Western European thought, drawing the admiration of such figures as John Stuart Mill, George Lewes, and Émile Littré.<sup>183</sup> The later work, however, veered in a direction of enthusiasm, passion, and religion that alarmed and ultimately turned these figures away.<sup>184</sup> In France, Comte's career was tragic: ridiculed and neglected, he never won any significant academic recognition, though his legacy of positivist sociology and positivist epistemology was to prove deep and persistent, especially in the French tradition.<sup>185</sup>

It is not so much that Marx represents a “synthesis” of Comte and Hegel as that he shares certain decisive orientations with Comte that shift him radically away from Hegel. Two similarities seem essential: the common scientific – one might even say, “scientistic” – concept of method in their two projects and their common outcome in the constitution of *historical sociology* as successor to philosophy of history. But the differences are also prominent. Marx remained the heir of Hegel, and dialectics “inverted” is still German philosophy of a very distinctive sort that Comte could never accommodate. Likewise, the *telos* in the two systems proved starkly different. If, notwithstanding their scientism, both Comte and Marx need ultimately to be understood as utopian, the political and cultural terms of their envisioned future resolution of history assume almost polar opposition. It is bitterly ironic that such critics as Popper and Hayek can only see totalitarianism in the visions of (Hegel and) Marx and strain to find liberalism in Comte. John Stuart Mill had a clearer grasp of the deeply totalitarian impetus in Comte's technocratic utopia, especially in its later, messianic incarnation.<sup>186</sup> It

<sup>182</sup> Lenzner, Introduction to *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, xxxii.

<sup>183</sup> See especially John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (1865; reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973).

<sup>184</sup> This theme of the “two Comtes” is central to the discussion of his career in the studies by Manuel and Mazlish.

<sup>185</sup> Giddens stresses the “importance of the line of connection from Comte to Durkheim” for the genesis of “positivistic sociology” (“Positivism and Its Critics,” 243). “Durkheim's writings have been more influential than those of any other author in academic social science in the spread of ‘positivistic sociology’” (245). For a substantial literature on positivist sociology, see Peter Halfpenny and Peter McMyler, eds., *Positivist Sociology and Its Critics*, 3 vols. (Brookfield, Vt.: Elgar, 1994); Halfpenny, *Positivism and Sociology: Explaining Social Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982); Jeffrey Alexander, *Positivism, Presuppositions, and Current Controversies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). On Comte's legacy of philosophical positivism, see Leszek Kolakowski, *Positivist Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); D. G. Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France During the Second Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); and W. M. Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963).

<sup>186</sup> Popper, *Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2; Hayek, “Comte and Hegel”; J. S. Mill noted in *On Liberty*: “M. Comte, in particular, whose social system, as unfolded in his *Système de politique*

also makes a crucial difference that while Comte builds his system on the basis of the history of *science*, Marx orients his own system to the history of *technology*. The concreteness of the latter choice constitutes the essential distinctness of Marx's philosophy of history, relative to both Comte and Hegel, as well as its greater potential utility to subsequent historical sociology and social history. As Marx observed, "The multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society, hence ... the 'history of humanity' must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange."<sup>187</sup> "Industry is the actual, historic relation of nature, and therefore of natural science, to man."<sup>188</sup>

Marx's view of science, as he found his own philosophical position, shared many key epistemological and metaphysical tenets with the positivism that Comte was constructing. Most importantly, Marx insisted upon cause-and-effect, materialist explanation. There was only one science, in his view, appropriate to man as much as to nature. "History itself is a *real* part of *natural history* – of nature's coming to be man. Natural science will in time subsume under itself the science of man, just as the science of man will subsume under itself natural science: there will be *one* science."<sup>189</sup> Man must be conceived primordially and definitively as a natural entity. The most fundamental element of human experience is the need to provide for material requirements. Thus, "as individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce":<sup>190</sup>

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life.<sup>191</sup>

For Marx, the essence of man lies in his praxis, his self-realization through action:

Free, conscious activity is man's species character. ... It is just in the working-up of the objective world, therefore, that man first really proves himself to be a *species being*. ... Through and because of this production, nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labour is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species life*: for he duplicates

*positive*, aims at establishing (though by moral more than by legal appliances) a despotism of society over the individual, surpassing anything contemplated in the political ideal of the most rigid disciplinarian among the ancient philosophers" (Mill, *On Liberty* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1948], 56).

<sup>187</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:43; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 157.

<sup>188</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, CW 3:303; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 90.

<sup>189</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts*, CW 3:303–4; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 90–1.

<sup>190</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:31–2; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 150.

<sup>191</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:31; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 150.

himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created.<sup>192</sup>

In this way, man's *necessary* compulsion as a natural entity – to survive and prosper in a given environment – is turned into his *voluntary* project as a practical-rational agent: labor as self-realization. The locus of human reality, then, lies in this process of activity, in which *labor* is the essential characteristic. Mankind undertakes to remove itself from the domination of nature, of natural forces, through the construction of productive resources. With this conception, Marx transfigures a determinism into a normatively affirmative process of human mastery of nature.

Marx conceives of *labor* as the imposition of human will upon nature and therefore of *history* as the process through which nature is, as it were, domesticated. For Marx, history is a naturalistic concern, and man a natural being, but a natural being that had so thoroughly penetrated and transformed nature that it is just as reasonable now to consider nature a thoroughly historical, thoroughly humanized form:

The world surrounding [man] is not something directly given and the same for all eternity but the product of industry and of the state of society ... a historical product, the result of the activity of whole successions of generations. ... The kind of nature that preceeded human history is by no means the nature in which [man] now lives, the nature which no longer exists anywhere, except perhaps on a few Australian coral islands.<sup>193</sup>

Thus, philosophically Marx undertook a fusion of historicism with naturalism:

The identity of nature and man appears in such a way that the restricted relation of men to nature determines their restricted relation to one another, and their restricted relation to one another determines men's restricted relation to nature.<sup>194</sup>

"The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production."<sup>195</sup> This led Marx to discern the *irony* in history:

Mankind becomes master of nature, but man the slave of man. ... The result of all our inventions and progress seems to be that material powers become invested with spiritual life, while human life deteriorates into a material force. ... This antagonism between modern industry and science, on the one side, modern misery and corruption, on the other side, this antagonism between the forces of production and the social conditions of our epoch, is a tangible, overwhelming and undeniable fact.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>192</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts*, CW 3:276–7; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 76.

<sup>193</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:39–40; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 170–1.

<sup>194</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:44; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 158.

<sup>195</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:32; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 150.

<sup>196</sup> Marx, "Die Revolution von 1848 und das Proletariat" (1856), cited in Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 36.

Marx is at one with Schiller about the profound alienation of modern society, which he, even more than Schiller, can link to division of labor in society. In the effort to domesticate nature by developing productive means of technological control, it became necessary to organize society to carry out these productive arrangements efficiently. Social order was determined, in other words, by the division of labor required by the technological solution achieved in each phase of man's development of the domestication of nature. But what for Schiller is the specific mark of modernity is for Marx the master key to the whole march of history: "The division of labour offers us the first example of how ... man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him." For Marx, this had to be seen as "one of the chief factors in historical development up till now."<sup>197</sup> This set the terms for Marx's new project of historical reconstruction of economic and technological history:

This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e., civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history. . . .

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises the legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.<sup>198</sup>

For Marx, this provided the key to the riddle of history. Thus, he asserted boldly in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848): "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle."<sup>199</sup> While man's effort to master material production has an autonomous developmental history, according to Marx, the cultural "superstructure" does not. "Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development."<sup>200</sup> That is to say, one can and must explain scientifically how society develops in terms of the real natural problem of controlling nature and producing wealth.

<sup>197</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:47–8; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 160.

<sup>198</sup> Marx, Preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), CW 29:263.

<sup>199</sup> Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, CW 6:402; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 473.

<sup>200</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:36–7; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 154–5.

Here, history and political economy both converge as the study of technological improvement and the social relations necessary to accommodate it. These production modes and production relations entail a series of cultural and intellectual concomitants, but “unless material production itself is understood in its specific historical form, it is impossible to grasp the characteristics of the intellectual production which corresponds to it or the reciprocal action between the two.”<sup>201</sup> Political-legal, religious-moral, and aesthetic forms prove dialectically related to the modes and relations of production:

The conditions under which definite productive forces can be applied are the conditions of the rule of a definite class of society whose social power, deriving from its property, has its practical-idealistic expression in the form of the state as it happens to exist then.<sup>202</sup>

Ironically, but essentially, this ruling class can exercise its dominion only if it persuades itself and its subordinate classes that its principles of authority promote the universal concerns of the society.

Each new class which displaces the one previously dominant is forced, simply to be able to carry out its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society, that is, ideally expressed, it has to give its ideas the form of universality and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. A ruling class must always propound, both for itself and especially for those it dominates, a warrant for its domination. That is what Marx meant by the famous claim, “in every epoch the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas.”<sup>203</sup> While Marx set about demonstrating this principle of the development of history through four great epochs of the modes of production, from Asiatic to modern European capitalism, following the grand trajectory of all the German philosophies of history, his interest focused intensely upon the last, and the hope for its overthrow.

The bourgeois epoch achieved a massive technological breakthrough, far surpassing all the rest of recorded history and seeming even to imply triumph over the principle of scarcity, which had held man in thrall to his natural requirements. At the same time, it radically simplified – or was in the process of radically simplifying – the class structure of society, so that all extraneous intermediate classes were dissolved into two fundamentally opposed classes, poised for the final confrontation, which would bring history to an end. Not only had the bourgeois epoch succeeded in these two massive ways; it had also dissolved all the spiritual

<sup>201</sup> Marx, “Economic Manuscript of 1861–63,” CW 31:182.

<sup>202</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:52.

<sup>203</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:60.

consolations and rationalizations of the past into blatant and brutal structures of economic power:

All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, . . . and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.<sup>204</sup>

The essential mark of bourgeois capitalist ascendancy is the erosion of traditional mediations:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly turn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left standing no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. . . . In a word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.<sup>205</sup>

Marx cites Adam Smith, from *Wealth of Nations*, "We address ourselves not to other men's humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages," and comments, "We are so much mutually alienated from human nature that the direct language of this nature is an injury to human dignity for us, while the alienated language of objective values appears as justified, self-confident and self-accepted human dignity."<sup>206</sup> In understanding the specific character of the bourgeois epoch of production, Marx found it essential to demystify its privileged ideology, the "science" of political economy:

Political economy starts with the fact of private property, but it does not explain it to us. It expresses in general, abstract formulas the *material* process through which private property actually passes, and these formulas it then takes for *laws*. It does not *comprehend* these laws, i.e., it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property. Political economy does not disclose the source of the division of labor between labor and capital, and between labor and land.<sup>207</sup>

Thus, "political economy" required *radical* critique but, as Marx grasped via German idealism, this could only occur through engagement with what was most authentically *human*.<sup>208</sup> This, however, political economy elided and perverted. Marx supplied the missing key:

<sup>204</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, CW 5:59; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 172–3.

<sup>205</sup> Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, CW 6:486–7; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 475.

<sup>206</sup> Adam Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 1:26–7, discussed by Marx, *Manuscripts*, CW 3:227.

<sup>207</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts*, CW 3:270–1; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 70.

<sup>208</sup> "To be radical is to go to the root, but for man the root is man himself," Marx wrote in "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," CW 3:182.

Political economy, the science of *wealth*, is therefore, at the same time, the science of renunciation, of privation and saving. . . . The science of a marvellous industry is at the same time the science of *asceticism*. Its true ideal is the *ascetic* but *usurious* miser and the *ascetic* but *productive* slave.<sup>209</sup>

Price and *dignity* had been fundamentally contrasted in German moral philosophy since Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), where Kant argued that precisely what it means to be a person is to have a dignity that is beyond all price.<sup>210</sup> But what political economy did was precisely to vest human dignity in purchasing power. It instituted a fundamental inversion of the natural into the artificial, a systematic dehumanization through which money displaced human nature.

Finally, the bourgeoisie created a new class, the proletariat, which, subjected to this complete form of exploitation, suffered complete dehumanization:

The object which labour produces – labour's product – confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer . . . the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. . . . The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. . . . His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*.<sup>211</sup>

Marx endorsed proletarian revolution, "not as though it is only a question of their emancipation but because in their emancipation is contained universal human emancipation."<sup>212</sup> In its class struggle against the bourgeoisie, the industrial proletariat could not but act authentically in the universal interest of humanity.

Because the abstraction of all humanity and even the *semblance* of humanity is practically complete in the fully developed proletariat, because the conditions of life of the proletariat bring all the conditions of present society into a most inhuman focus, . . . therefore the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it cannot emancipate itself without transcending the conditions of its own life. It cannot transcend the conditions of its own life without transcending *all* the inhuman conditions of present society.<sup>213</sup>

Its revolution, then, would mark the end of history, the actualization of a true ethical totality. That utopian vision, subsequent history has made all too clear, failed. With it fell Marx's philosophy of history, but certainly not his impact on historical sociology.

Marx conceived of the end of history, of the ethical totality, and even of the concrete fulfillment of individual life through self-realizing labor on models

<sup>209</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts*, CW 3:309; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 95–6.

<sup>210</sup> Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 4:434.

<sup>211</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts*, CW 3:273–4; *Marx-Engels Reader*, 71–4.

<sup>212</sup> Marx, "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," CW 3:186.

<sup>213</sup> Marx, *The Holy Family*, CW 4:36–7.



taken from idealism. The normative element in his thought is nowhere more visible and essential. Yet the question is how it was possible for Marx to ground this normativity in his “science” of history. Marx in fact smuggled it in from premises inconsistent with his “science.” In trying to become more “scientific” than Hegel, he emphasized the technical-purposive character of human praxis but blurred with it ethical purposiveness. Kant had already made clear the irreducible difference between these two notions of practical reason.<sup>214</sup> Marx could not methodologically reduce the ethical to the technical; nor could he redeem his interest in history without affirming the ethical. That left it an ungrounded principle of his thought. It came to him, in fact, from the idealist-romantic notion of artistic genius: self-realization through artifice. But to extend this model of art to all of labor demanded a far more rigorous derivation of the normative value of the model.

In Marx we see a philosophy of history that draws on both the Enlightenment and idealism for its premises. The driving interest in his thought derives from idealism: it is the aspiration to an ethical totality to be realized in the end of history, providing meaning to the entire sweep of history, with all its toil and trouble. But the method that animates his thought is taken from the Enlightenment and its aspiration to a social science based on principles authorized by natural science. Similarly, the radicalism of Marx’s projection of positive values into the future compares with the doctrine of progress of the Enlightenment. Yet, if one takes away the utopianism of Marx’s teleology of history and one takes away the romanticism of his criterion of fulfilled humanity, the balance of his thought has the features of a “science” that falls all the way back to the mechanism of late Enlightenment “science of man.” That was the path that thought on society and history would follow in the balance of the modern period. Indeed, after and through Marx, the question of making sense of history passed definitively out of the hands of philosophy into those of the newly constituted “social sciences.”

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<sup>214</sup> Kant, *First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment*, Ak 20:199–200; Eng. trans., 389–90.

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## THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

MICHAEL N. FORSTER

The nineteenth century was a great age of advances in the writing of history of philosophy. These advances were largely achieved in Germany. The ground for them had already been prepared by eighteenth-century historians of philosophy there, especially Brucker and Tiedemann, who had both been inspired by the Leibniz-Wolff tradition's rationalist philosophy. With the advent toward the end of the eighteenth century of a new and even greater age in German philosophy, writers of history of philosophy were inspired to reach new heights on the basis of those earlier preparations. In doing so, they were also supported by a broader concern with history, especially the history of culture, and a broader development of historical and interpretive methods that emerged in Germany during the same period. This chapter will attempt to give an account of the main advances that were achieved.

## KANT, HEGEL, AND "OFFICIAL" HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

A fairly conventional account of the writing of history of philosophy in the nineteenth century might go roughly as follows.

The two most famous philosophers from around the beginning of the century – Kant (1724–1804) and Hegel (1770–1831) – were also in a sense the century's greatest contributors to writing the history of the discipline. Kant, though not himself very deeply concerned with the history of philosophy, nonetheless paid significant attention to it (for example, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* from 1781/7; the *Logic* lectures, a version of which he published in 1800; and the *Prize Essay* concerning progress in metaphysics since Leibniz and Wolff, which was written in 1791 and published in 1804). In particular, he developed two a priori schemas for interpreting the history of philosophy. According to the first

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and more prominent of these, the history of the discipline had been a progression from recurring cycles of dogmatism in metaphysics, followed by skepticism concerning it, to their eventual culmination in the mediating position of his own critical philosophy, which at last established a scientific form of metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> According to a second schema, the history of the discipline had been a progression from recurring cycles of rationalism versus empiricism to their eventual culmination in his own critical philosophy, a mediating position that at last established a proper synthesis of the two.<sup>2</sup>

Somewhat similarly, Hegel, who was much more concerned with the history of philosophy than Kant had been, presented in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1805–31) an a priori picture according to which the history of philosophy had consisted of a series of philosophical positions that were teleologically directed toward the eventual achievement of his own philosophy, or “Science,” a series that in particular unfolded in proper sequence the categories of his own Logic. For Hegel the history of philosophy accordingly began with the Eleatics (Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Melissus), who developed the logical principle of Being; proceeded thence to Heraclitus, who developed the logical principle of Becoming; and eventually led to such philosophers of the modern period as Descartes, Spinoza, and Fichte, who developed phases of the more subjective culminating principle of the Logic, the Idea.

Kant's and Hegel's pictures of the history of philosophy held great appeal for contemporaries, both because of their own prestige as philosophers and because of their interpretation of the history of philosophy as a triumphant progressive march toward definitive truth and science in philosophy. Indeed, Kant and Hegel added to this appeal by also interpreting such progress in philosophy as a key to historical progress tout court, since they both conceived the latter as consisting in the gradual development of *reason*, a development that already for Kant seems inseparable from the development of *philosophical* reason, and which Hegel explicitly equates with it. These Kantian and Hegelian pictures of the history of philosophy accordingly motivated and deeply influenced a whole succession of nineteenth-century academic historians of philosophy (albeit that the latter often modified the Kantian and Hegelian pictures in various ways, for example, by combining elements from both pictures). Among those who were strongly motivated and influenced by Kant were W. G. Tennemann in his *History of Philosophy* (1798–1819) and *Outline of the History of Philosophy* (1812), J. F. Fries in *The History of Philosophy* (1837), K. Fischer in his *History of Modern Philosophy* (1852–), and W. Windelband in his *Textbook of the History of Philosophy* (1892). Among those who

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A761/B789.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A271/B327, A853–4/B881–2.

were strongly motivated and influenced by Hegel were the Frenchman Victor Cousin, in his *Introduction to the History of Philosophy* (1828) and other works, as well as the Germans J. E. Erdmann in his *Presentation and Critique of Descartes' Philosophy, Together with an Introduction to the History of Modern Philosophy* (1834), G. O. Marbach in his *Textbook of the History of Philosophy* (1838–), K. L. Michelet in his *History of the Last Systems of Philosophy in Germany from Kant to Hegel* (1837–8) and *Developmental History of the Most Recent German Philosophy* (1843), E. Zeller in *The Philosophy of the Greeks* (1844–52) and *The Philosophy of the Greeks in Its Historical Development* (1855), C. Prantl in his *History of Logic in the West* (1855–70), and Fischer and Windelband again (who were influenced as much by Hegel as by Kant). Also noteworthy in this connection is F. Überweg (et al.), *Outline of the History of Philosophy* (1862–6), a frequently republished and expanded collaborative work that aspires to be a neutral handbook of the history of philosophy but that nonetheless clearly draws on the prestige that had been lent to the subject by Kant, Hegel, and their more overt followers.

Such an account of the writing of history of philosophy in the nineteenth century is certainly true as far as it goes. That is to say, it does properly characterize what one might call the “official core” of the discipline. However, there is something rather disconcerting about this official core, for, in retrospect, it was surely rather naïve of people in this tradition to suppose that philosophy had at last received the form of definitive true science with Kant and/or Hegel, and that the history of philosophy could therefore be understood as the progressive attainment of such a goal, let alone that it thereby constituted the key to understanding history tout court as a corresponding march of progress. In short, this official core of nineteenth-century history of philosophy was founded on a sort of elaborate myth.

That is not to say that the histories of philosophy written within this tradition were therefore without value – far from it. Just as Brucker and Tiedemann's eighteenth-century myth that Leibniz and Wolff had at last achieved definitive philosophical truth performed the helpful function of interesting them enough in the history of philosophy to enable them to collect a vast body of useful information about it, so this Kantian-Hegelian myth was helpful in motivating the accumulation of a vast amount of further useful information by their successors. Also, the Kantian-Hegelian myth performed various additional helpful functions, such as encouraging historians of philosophy to look for genuine value in the ideas of past philosophers and to see the history of philosophy not merely as a sequence of different doctrines, but as a sort of continuous conversation in which later philosophers responded to earlier ones. Also, it should be kept in mind that the historians of philosophy in question, especially those among them who were less rigid in their commitment to the guiding progressive myth, wrote, and can

be read, over quite long stretches without the myth being particularly obtrusive. Still, all that said, perceiving the fundamental weakness in this official core of nineteenth-century history of philosophy that I mentioned does take much of the excitement out of it.

It is in part because of this ambiguous value of the more official side of nineteenth-century history of philosophy that I would like in this chapter to emphasize some less obvious contributions to the discipline that were made in the nineteenth century. Rather than saying any more about the Kantian-Hegelian progressive pictures and the myriad official histories of philosophy that they inspired,<sup>3</sup> I shall henceforth focus mainly on some of the century's leading philosophers and their views concerning the history of philosophy. And rather than privileging the official histories' cheery but dubious progressive visions of the history of constructive philosophy, I shall mainly be interested in historical accounts of the more negative or skeptical side of philosophy, certain methodological issues, and critical approaches to the history of philosophy.

#### FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL

To inaugurate the somewhat contrarian spirit of this chapter, I would like to begin by discussing Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829). Schlegel is not commonly thought of as a contributor to the writing of history of philosophy at all. For example, Martial Gueroult in his magisterial *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie*, while he devotes much attention to Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and many other Germans, says nothing about Schlegel.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, I want to suggest that Schlegel played a crucial role, indeed several crucial roles, in the development of history of philosophy in the nineteenth century.

Hegel and Schleiermacher are often credited with having created a new respect for, and sense of the value in, the earlier phases of the history of philosophy, especially ancient philosophy. However, it seems to me that it was Schlegel who was the greatest innovator in this respect, and that he exerted a powerful influence over both Hegel and Schleiermacher.

Schlegel's contribution here emerged from the background of a general picture of history that was almost the opposite of the period's predominant Kantian-

<sup>3</sup> For more information on this subject, see M. Gueroult, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris, 1984–), vols. 2 and 3, and L. Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert – Zur Wissenschaftstheorie der Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung und -betrachtung* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Geldsetzer does mention Schlegel's work in passing, but even he only focuses on a few rather marginal and uninspiring ideas from it, such as that strictly speaking there cannot be a history of philosophy, but only "criticism" and that it should be approached by way of "construction" (Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, 134, 221).

Hegelian progressive picture: a classicism that saw the ancients as superior to the moderns and thus conceived history as not progressive but regressive. This was certainly Schlegel's outlook until about 1796. In that year he famously underwent a sort of reversal of position that led him to qualify his classicism in favor of romanticism and consequently became somewhat more sympathetic to a progressive view of history. But he had already begun his reading of ancient philosophy, especially Plato, several years before this reversal occurred, and even after the reversal he still tended to think of the classical as of equal value with the romantic. Accordingly, his relation to ancient philosophy was initially formed, and remained heavily influenced, by an outlook of extreme admiration for the ancients.<sup>5</sup>

This outlook contributed to his development of at least two more specific interpretive positions that were of great importance. First, and foremost, he valorized Plato to an extraordinary degree. He had already read Plato in the Greek in the late 1780s and was immediately smitten by him. During the period 1797–1806 his enthusiasm for Plato crystallized around several Platonic principles in which he saw great intrinsic value, including: (1) Plato's conception of philosophy as an endless striving for knowledge (this conception became fundamental to Schlegel's own romanticism); (2) Plato's choice of the dialogue as a genre for philosophy, which corresponded to that conception of philosophy, since individual dialogues approach knowledge but do not purport to achieve it, and likewise, taken together, they constitute a series of related attempts to reach knowledge that, while making progress, still does not purport to achieve it (Schlegel occasionally uses the dialogue form himself for similar reasons and also conceives his own more central genre of the fragment in similar terms); (3) Plato's depiction of Socrates' irony, which, on Schlegel's interpretation, accordingly reflects both an aspiration to achieve knowledge and a recognition of its nonattainment or unattainability (Schlegel makes such a conception of irony a central feature of his own romanticism).

Schlegel's valorization of Plato led to Schleiermacher's far better known work on Plato and in some ways remains more important for history of philosophy than the latter. For it was Schlegel's enthusiasm for Plato that originally motivated his and Schleiermacher's inception in the late 1790s of the joint project of translating Plato's dialogues (a project from which Schlegel subsequently withdrew, leaving Schleiermacher to complete, or nearly complete, the task), and that thereby indirectly motivated Schleiermacher's accompanying scholarship on the dialogues, including his prefaces to the translations and an influential article on

<sup>5</sup> A similar attitude can be found at about the same period in a close associate of the Schlegel brothers: the young Schelling. Cf. Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, 186–7.

Socrates. And not only did Schleiermacher, in striking contrast to Schlegel, initially lack any deep philosophical affinity with Plato (rather looking to Kant and Spinoza as his philosophical models during the 1790s), but he never succeeded in making a case for Plato's importance as a philosopher that was quite as compelling as Schlegel's.

Second, and relatedly, unlike Schleiermacher, Schlegel came to perceive value in ancient skepticism and in the skeptical side of the Sophistic movement. He first became deeply interested in skepticism in about 1796, when he began associating with a skeptical circle in Jena around Niethammer that was deploying skepticism to attack the constructive philosophy of the period (in particular, Fichte's philosophy). In a course of lectures on Transcendental Philosophy that he delivered in Jena in 1800–1 Schlegel argued for the importance of a radical form of skepticism (a form that even went as far as to call into question logical laws) as an essential starting point for any genuine philosophy. And in a further course of lectures on philosophy and its history that he delivered in Cologne in 1804–6 he explicitly praised ancient Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism in this connection, contrasting them favorably with modern forms of skepticism. Hegel attended Schlegel's 1800–1 lectures and shortly afterward published a seminal essay, *Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy* (1802), in which he basically repeated Schlegel's ideas that a radical form of skepticism is an essential starting point for any genuine philosophy, and that this form is to be found in ancient rather than modern skepticism (while also developing these ideas into a more detailed investigation of ancient skepticism and emphasizing even more than Schlegel had the superiority of radical ancient skepticism to the tamer forms of skepticism that are characteristic of modernity).<sup>6</sup>

In a similar vein, Schlegel came to recognize considerable value in the ancient Sophistic movement, namely, for its skeptical component. Already in the 1800–1 lectures he advances a doctrine that all truth is relative, which he has clearly drawn from the ancient Sophist Protagoras (as depicted in Plato's *Theaetetus*). In the 1804–6 lectures he goes on to emphasize the importance of the skeptical side of the Sophistic movement for the history of philosophy more explicitly. In this connection, he especially focuses on Gorgias's version of skepticism and notes the great extent to which Aristotle's development of logic was motivated by the

<sup>6</sup> It is just possible that part of the influence here was the other way around, i.e., that Schlegel's emphasis on Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism in the Cologne lectures was inspired by a reading of Hegel's 1802 essay (Schlegel's Cologne lectures on German language and literature from 1807 do contain some fairly clear allusions to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* from the same year). However, this does not seem very likely, given the longevity by that time of Schlegel's interest in both ancient philosophy and skepticism, which went back as far as the late 1780s to mid-1790s. It seems more likely that his valorization of these ancient forms of skepticism over modern ones was already part of the position that he espoused orally when he lectured in 1800–1.



ambition to counter the subversions of the Sophistic movement. Schlegel's positive appreciation of the Sophistic movement (which, like his positive appreciation of ancient skepticism, is quite absent from Schleiermacher, whose picture of it is entirely negative) again seems to have influenced Hegel, for Hegel's own treatment of the history of philosophy is likewise striking for its perception of importance in the skeptical ideas of the Sophists, especially as sources of motivation for the more positive ancient philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Subsequently, a number of other nineteenth-century historians of philosophy would adopt this favorable reading of the Sophistic movement in one form or another – for example, C. A. Brandis and E. Zeller to some extent, and especially G. Grote, T. Gomperz, and Nietzsche.

Indeed, it seems likely that when Hegel began lecturing on the history of philosophy in 1805 and chose to play up the importance of Plato's skeptical side (which he already emphasizes in his 1802 essay), ancient skepticism itself, and the skeptical side of the ancient Sophistic movement as central aspects of the history of philosophy, not only were his emphasis on these skeptical aspects of the history of philosophy and his conception of their essential role in motivating constructive philosophy the result of Schlegel's influence, but his very interest in the history of philosophy was so as well.<sup>7</sup>

Schlegel and Hegel's whole new emphasis on the importance of the more skeptical side of ancient philosophy subsequently survived as a significant strand of nineteenth-century history of philosophy both in Germany and elsewhere – for example, with Grote in England. It constitutes one of Schlegel's most important contributions to history of philosophy.

Turning from the content of history of philosophy to its methodology: One of the more striking inadequacies of Kant's and Hegel's approaches to the subject was their interpretive tendentiousness. In a famous passage of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant foreswore undertaking "any literary enquiry into the meaning" of a past philosopher such as Plato, on the grounds that "it is by no means unusual ... to find that we have understood him better than he understood himself."<sup>8</sup> This in effect meant that Kant preferred to impose his own views on past philosophers' texts rather than to interpret them carefully. Hegel's approach to past philosophers was somewhat similar. By contrast, Schlegel, who had begun his career as

<sup>7</sup> Hegel and Schlegel's well-known mutual antipathy is not a good argument against this hypothesis. Thinkers often owe most to other thinkers whom they like least. Moreover, Hegel's grudging respect for Schlegel can be documented in at least one other case: late in life, in the 1830 draft of his introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel lavishly praised the revolution in modern linguistics that had been started by Schlegel's *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* from 1808, albeit while contriving to avoid giving Schlegel credit by name.

<sup>8</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, A313–14/B370.

a serious classicist, was far more concerned with faithfulness in interpretation and introduced a much more scrupulous methodology of interpretation in the interest of achieving it. Schleiermacher is more famous in this area because of the hermeneutics lectures that he delivered during the first third of the nineteenth century. But, as two German scholars, Körner and Patsch, have argued convincingly, it was actually Schlegel who introduced many of the hermeneutic principles for which Schleiermacher later became famous – namely, during the late 1790s when they were living together and collaborating in Berlin.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as I have myself argued in other work, Schlegel's hermeneutics is significantly superior to Schleiermacher's in certain respects.<sup>10</sup>

Schlegel's hermeneutics lies scattered throughout a number of works, including his notes *Philosophy of Philology* from 1797. Fundamental to his views on interpretation is a conviction, subsequently shared by Schleiermacher, that radical intellectual differences occur between historical periods (in the notes just mentioned he goes as far as to speak of an "absolute difference" between ancient and modern culture), and that this poses a huge challenge to interpretation, which therefore needs guiding principles. Among the specific hermeneutic principles that Körner and Patsch have plausibly identified as originally Schlegel's, before they became Schleiermacher's, are the following: Interpretation must forgo any reliance on religious assumptions (so-called *philologia sacra*); interpretation must construe the parts of a text in light of the *whole* text; interpretation must incorporate an identification of the author's psychological development; interpretation is interdependent with textual criticism; interpretation must seek to understand an author better than he understood himself (in a sense different from Kant's);<sup>11</sup> interpretation needs to use *divination*, or hypothesis; and, finally, interpretation is therefore not merely a science but an art. The hermeneutic principles that I have myself argued to be more distinctive of Schlegel and to constitute points of superiority in his hermeneutics over Schleiermacher's include the following: Interpretation must identify genre correctly, something that is often very difficult because of the historical mutability and variability of genres (this principle plays a role in Schlegel's reflections on the nature of the Platonic dialogues, for

<sup>9</sup> J. Körner, "Friedrich Schlegels 'Philosophie der Philologie' mit einer Einleitung herausgegeben von Josef Körner," *Logos* 17 (1928): 1–72; H. Patsch, "Friedrich Schlegels 'Philosophie der Philologie' und Schleiermachers frühe Entwürfe zur Hermeneutik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 63 (1966): 434–72.

<sup>10</sup> See my "Friedrich Schlegel's Hermeneutics," in *German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Schlegel and Schleiermacher both reused this famous dictum of Kant's, but they also significantly altered its meaning. For Schlegel, it came to mean discovering an author's unconscious meaning (rather than, as for Kant, something between that and imposing one's own meaning). For Schleiermacher, it came to mean, more narrowly, grasping explicitly the grammatical and other linguistic rules that an author had himself only grasped implicitly or tacitly.

example); interpretation must also take account of the fact that texts sometimes convey important meanings, not explicitly in their parts, but rather through their parts and the way in which these are put together to form a whole (Schlegel illustrates this principle in one place by arguing, quite plausibly, that the distinctive overall forms of Spinoza's and Fichte's texts already convey their opposing philosophical principles); interpretation must also take account of the fact that texts sometimes convey *unconscious* meanings (this is another principle that is richly suggestive for interpreting philosophy); and finally, interpretation must recognize that texts often contain self-contradictions and other forms of confusion and moreover must seek to explain these features when they occur (Schlegel explicitly applies this principle to certain philosophical writings, including those of Kant and Georg Forster).

Schlegel also made a number of further contributions to history of philosophy. One of these was again methodological: a principle that it is necessary to provide what in the 1804–6 Cologne lectures he calls “a genetic explanation of current philosophy.” Part of what he means by this is that there is a sense in which we cannot understand any philosophical position, including our own, unless we know how its concepts and principles have arisen historically. This point is a special application of Herder's “genetic method” (as Schlegel's use of Herder's term “genetic” shows). It later goes on to play an important role in Hegel's conception of history of philosophy as well. Part of its importance lies in the fact that it constitutes one attractive answer to the question why a philosopher needs to be concerned with the history of philosophy at all.

Another contribution of Schlegel's concerns Aristotle, about whom he develops both positive and negative ideas of importance. On the positive side, in the Cologne lectures he not only applauds Aristotle for developing logic (in response to the subversions of the Sophists), but also identifies Aristotle's conception of divine *nous* as an important new principle, one that he argues is in the spirit of idealism. Hegel would subsequently go on to make much of the latter point in his own interpretation of Aristotle.

Schlegel's negative ideas about Aristotle are perhaps even more important, though. Whereas Aristotle's authority in most of the core areas of theoretical philosophy had been weakened in a lasting way by Descartes and the scientific revolution in the early seventeenth century (with logic a notable exception), his authority on the nature of ancient literature, and especially ancient tragedy, in the *Poetics* had continued to be conceded throughout the eighteenth century. This was true not only in France, but also in Germany, where Lessing and Herder, although sharply critical of French conceptions and applications of Aristotle's theory of tragedy, had remained highly deferential toward the theory itself. That deference came to an abrupt end with Friedrich Schlegel (and his brother, August

Wilhelm). Friedrich argued that Aristotle belonged to the period of Greek tragedy's decline and therefore lacked authority concerning its highest forms. He criticized Aristotle's over-assimilation of tragedy to epic. He denied Aristotle's assumption that tragedy was historically fictional rather than factual in intention. And he insisted on the fundamentally religious, and in particular Dionysiac, nature of tragedy, which Aristotle had ignored. (August Wilhelm added a critique of the doctrine of the unities, arguing that it was only in small part Aristotle's in the first place, and moreover largely untrue to the nature of ancient tragedy; as well as a rejection of Aristotle's conception that tragedy's function was a catharsis of pity and fear.) This thoroughgoing and largely correct attack on Aristotle's interpretation of Greek tragedy prepared the ground for Nietzsche's similarly anti-Aristotelian and religion-/Dionysus-oriented interpretation of Greek tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), as well as for most recent scholarship on the subject. It also exposed Aristotle's profound unreliability as an interpreter of his predecessors more generally – a phenomenon that was subsequently explored further in connection with his misinterpretations of earlier philosophers by Schleiermacher, and more recently by Cherniss in *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*, both of whom were especially concerned with his misinterpretations of pre-Socratic philosophers. In short, Schlegel's attack was ultimately important not only because it exposed the inadequacy of Aristotle's account of ancient literature, and thereby made possible better accounts of it, but also because, by doing so, it indirectly exposed Aristotle's unreliability as an interpreter of his philosophical predecessors, thereby making possible better accounts of them as well.

Schlegel is also noteworthy for having looked beyond the philosophical tradition of the West to include "Oriental" philosophy within the history of the subject, in particular ancient Indian philosophy. In doing so, he was following in the footsteps of the Englishmen Colebrooke and Jones and to a lesser extent certain German forerunners.<sup>12</sup> Already in the Cologne lectures of 1804–6, and then more elaborately in his seminal work about Sanskrit language and literature, *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* (1808), he argued that such ancient Indian texts as the *Bhagavad-Gita* contained genuine philosophy, that this was indeed superior to Western philosophy in some respects, and moreover that it had influenced Western philosophy at crucial periods (for example, the Pythagoreans and Plato). Schlegel's pioneering work was subsequently followed and refined by other scholars in nineteenth-century Germany, including Wilhelm von Humboldt in two famous addresses on the *Bhagavad-Gita* that he delivered to the Berlin Academy in 1826. While Schlegel's thesis that ancient Indian philosophy exercised an *influence*

<sup>12</sup> Concerning some eighteenth-century German forerunners, see Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, 184.

on early Western philosophy today looks dubious, his insistence that it is genuine philosophy and of considerable value still seems defensible.

Schlegel's work also contributed to the emergence of a body of scholarship that was concerned to identify a broader range of "Oriental" counterparts to and influences on Western philosophy. Some of this scholarship was rather speculative and lacking in rigor – for example, the work of A. Gladisch, who argued that the five main pre-Socratic philosophies of ancient Greece had each originated from one of the five main "Oriental" nations: the Chinese, the Hindus, the Persians, the Egyptians, and the Jews.<sup>13</sup> But some of it was much more historically careful and philologically disciplined. To this category belongs especially E. Röth's *History of Our Western Philosophy: Developmental History of Our Speculative, Both Philosophical and Religious, Ideas from Their First Beginnings up to the Present* (1846–58; second, revised edition 1862).

Röth taught at Heidelberg and had undertaken thorough linguistic-philological preparation for his task (one of the dedicatees of his work is the great classical philologist Boeckh). He is open-minded and respectful about ancient Indian and Chinese philosophy but rejects the idea that either of them had an actual influence on early periods of Greek philosophy. Instead, he develops, with great erudition and force, a fascinating thesis – very much in the spirit of Bernal's *Black Athena*, but about a century and a half earlier – to the effect that ancient Greek religion and philosophy, rather than being exclusively "Aryan" or autochthonous as recent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classicists had claimed, largely arose from Egyptian sources (and to a lesser extent Middle Eastern sources, such as Zoroastrianism), as the ancient Greeks had themselves held. More specifically, he argues that there were three main phases of such influence: Concerning the first phase, he argues, very much as Bernal later would, that Egyptian religion was transported to Greece in the second millennium BC (especially by the "Pelasgians," whom – like Bernal – he identifies as Phoenicians coming out of Egypt) and formed the foundation for traditional Greek religion. Concerning the second phase, he argues that beginning in the seventh century BC, the first Greek philosophers, especially Thales and Pythagoras, traveled to Egypt (as well as the Middle East) and took back from there Egyptian religious, philosophical, and scientific ideas to form the basis of their own philosophies, and thereby the basis of the whole Greek (indeed, the whole Western) philosophical and scientific tradition.<sup>14</sup> Finally (and much less controversially), he argues that a third

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly enough, though, Nietzsche seems to take Gladisch's work seriously in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1772–3).

<sup>14</sup> More specifically, Röth makes a forceful case that ancient reports of Thales' travels to Egypt are historically plausible and that Thales drew from there his conception that the universe had

phase of Eastern influence occurred during the Hellenistic and early Christian periods, when new forms of religion and philosophy – especially Neoplatonism, Christianity, and Christian philosophy – arose from yet another infusion of Eastern ideas.<sup>15</sup>

Last, and perhaps somewhat less importantly, Schlegel also contributed to a revival of interest in medieval philosophy, which gathered pace after him with Schleiermacher and Hegel. Beginning around the turn of the century, Schlegel (together with his brother, August Wilhelm) increasingly valorized the medieval period, especially in contrast to the Enlightenment, which he began to consider culturally superficial by comparison. He also devoted considerable attention to medieval philosophy as part of his treatment of the history of philosophy in the Cologne lectures of 1804–6. In these ways he helped to prepare the ground for Schleiermacher and Hegel's even more extensive and sympathetic treatments of medieval philosophy in their respective histories of philosophy, as well as for the increased focus on this area in subsequent nineteenth-century history of philosophy.

a single fundamental source, his account of it as water, and his knowledge of astronomy (exemplified in his famous prediction of an eclipse). Similarly, R  th makes a strong case that ancient reports of Pythagoras's long residence and study with priests in Egypt (as well as in Babylon) are historically plausible and that such central features of Pythagoras's position as his strictly hierarchical, secretive, churchlike school; his distinctive religious views (including his conception of the soul and its afterlife); and his sophisticated mathematics all originated in Egypt.

<sup>15</sup> This whole exciting line of research was effectively shut down in Germany by the end of the nineteenth century. The century's earlier, Schleiermacher-influenced experts on Greek philosophy, Brandis and Ritter, had been relatively open-minded about the idea of Oriental influences: Brandis judiciously suspending judgment pending fuller information; Ritter showing great interest in the question of Oriental, and in particular Indian, influences (in his *History of Philosophy* he devotes not one but two extended discussions to it), and expressing great caution due to his lack of relevant expertise and information, though in the end inclining to deny that there were significant Oriental influences on the earlier phases of Greek philosophy. However, with the Eurocentric Hegel and his follower Zeller such skepticism hardened and came to dominate the field. Thus, Hegel in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, while he conceded that the ancient Chinese and Indians had had a rudimentary philosophy, was at pains to downplay its significance and value (he mentions Schlegel's work on the subject condescendingly, and in a review of Humboldt's addresses also responds coolly to Humboldt's claims for Indian philosophy's importance). And Hegel's follower Zeller then made an even firmer case for the virtual irrelevance of Oriental thought to the history of Western philosophy – in particular, arguing in *The Philosophy of the Greeks in Its Historical Development* against Gladisch and R  th that an Oriental influence on Greek philosophy was (1) unproven, (2) unlikely given the difficulties of transmission, (3) an unnecessary hypothesis given that the development of Greek philosophy could be explained *internally*, and (4) impossible because whereas Greek philosophy was "free," Oriental philosophy was not (!). Zeller's (not undeserved) high reputation as a historian of Greek philosophy evidently ensured that this position became widely accepted as the final word on the subject. But whether he was correct here seems quite doubtful. The recent publication of Said's *Orientalism* and especially Bernal's *Black Athena* would perhaps make this an appropriate time to reopen the debate.

## SCHLEIERMACHER

As is better known, Schleiermacher (1768–1834) made important contributions to history of philosophy as well. His contributions were not quite as original and powerful as Schlegel's, but they had the compensating virtues of being much more fully worked out and of exercising a more public influence.

First, Schleiermacher contributed greatly to the study of Socrates and Plato, both by bringing to fruition his own and Schlegel's project of translating the Platonic dialogues into German and by offering scholarly commentary relating to them. (He accomplished the latter in the prefaces that he wrote for the translations; in lectures on the history of philosophy that he delivered from 1812 on, which were published posthumously by his student Ritter in 1839; and in an influential essay on Socrates from 1815.)

Schleiermacher's translations of Plato are excellent and are still widely respected and used in Germany to this day. Moreover, he supported and complemented them with one of the deepest works on the methodology of translation ever written, the seminal essay *On the Different Methods of Translation* (1813).

Schleiermacher's *commentary* on Socrates and Plato also constituted an important achievement, though one with more serious limitations. Schleiermacher developed an explanation of Socrates' value as a philosopher, and by implication Plato's, that was both illuminating and influential – albeit less compelling than the one Schlegel had given or the one Hegel and Zeller would give. In the influential essay *On Socrates' Value as a Philosopher* (1815) Schleiermacher argued that Socrates' great merit was that he turned philosophy away from a concern with reality, or nature, toward a concern with knowledge and introduced a method that focused on proper concept-formation and -combination. If properly construed, this is true and important as far as it goes, but it does not seem entirely satisfactory either as an explanation of why the ancient world found Socrates' ideas so valuable or of why we should (it is only likely to seem so if one happens to be a Kantian, and therefore inclined to construe it anachronistically, and to be impressed by it, as a sort of description of Kantianism *avant la lettre*).<sup>16</sup>

Schleiermacher made numerous narrower interpretive suggestions concerning the Platonic dialogues that are genuinely illuminating as well. For example,

<sup>16</sup> Schleiermacher also implies a different case for Plato's importance in the dialectics lectures that he began delivering in 1811. There he himself conceives knowledge in quasi-Platonic terms as something that can only be approximated in a process of endless striving. Moreover, in later cycles of the lectures he accords real dialogue a central role in this process, just as Plato had done (having in earlier cycles, by contrast, envisaged something more like Aristotelian "dialectic"). However, this whole implied case for Plato's importance only unfolded relatively late, remained implicit, and basically just repeated Schlegel's case.

he pointed out that Plato's choice of the dialogue form should be understood in light of the views that he expresses in the *Phaedrus* and elsewhere concerning the superiority of the spoken over the written word.

Schleiermacher also made a certain amount of progress in connection with the question of the chronological order and development of the dialogues. In particular, he performed the important service of substituting for the traditional ancient divisions of the dialogues into groups according to content, a new focus on their order of composition and of distinguishing among early, middle, and late sets of dialogues (as we still do today). However, his conception of which dialogues belonged to which periods, far from anticipating the broad consensus about this that we enjoy today (so that twentieth-century scholars as different in their approaches in other respects as Robinson and Vlastos largely agree on which dialogues belong to which periods), looks bizarre by modern lights. For instance, he assigns the *Phaedrus* and the *Parmenides* to the early period, the *Sophist* to the middle, and the *Republic* to the late! This strange ordering was largely the result of a dubious assumption Schleiermacher made that Plato began writing the dialogues with a fixed philosophical position in mind, which he merely unfolded over the course of successive dialogues rather than changing.<sup>17</sup>

Second, Schleiermacher also contributed significant scholarship on further topics in ancient philosophy, both in the form of brief treatments in the lectures on the history of philosophy that he delivered from 1812 on, and in the form of separate monographs on Heraclitus, Anaximander, and Diogenes of Apollonia. His scholarship on pre-Socratic philosophy was especially important. One of his achievements here was a careful collation of sources. Another was a recognition of the frequent unreliability of Aristotle's reports on the pre-Socratics.

<sup>17</sup> Schlegel in the Cologne lectures gives virtually the same chronological order for the dialogues as Schleiermacher, so he cannot claim any superiority in this area. Nor did Brandis or Ritter significantly improve matters, instead basically following Schleiermacher. The credit for developing our modern ordering largely belongs to a different group of nineteenth-century German scholars of ancient philosophy – especially Hermann, Nitzsch, Stallbaum, Steinhart, and Susemihl – who introduced the modern conception that Plato began his writing career with a broadly Socratic phase, during which he wrote such dialogues as the *Lysis*, the *Laches*, the *Charmides*, the *Protagoras*, the *Euthyphro*, and the *Crito*, before going on to develop his own more independent theories in subsequent works. (Already during the nineteenth century this picture began to receive a measure of independent confirmation from the novel method of stylometric analysis, as developed by Campbell, Dittenberger, Schanz, C. Ritter, Lutoslawski, and Baron.) It is worth mentioning that this sort of approach would later be imitated to some extent early in the twentieth century by Jaeger in order to determine the chronological development of Aristotle's philosophy. Thus Jaeger similarly thought that Aristotle had begun his career with a broadly Platonic phase before going on to develop a more independent position (in this case an empiricist one), and he used this picture as a criterion for fixing the chronological order of Aristotle's writings. However, despite a certain prima facie plausibility, this approach to Aristotle has failed to achieve the sort of scholarly consensus that the corresponding approach to Plato has achieved.



Schleiermacher's work on ancient philosophy had an enormous influence on his successors in nineteenth-century Germany – a fact that was widely acknowledged at the time. The two most influential historians of ancient philosophy in the next generation – H. Ritter, author of *History of Philosophy* (1829–53), and C. A. Brandis, author of *Handbook of the History of Greek-Roman Philosophy* (1835–66) – were both pupils of Schleiermacher's. Moreover, they generally followed him not only in their general methodology (as discussed later), but also in their interpretations and evaluations of particular ancient philosophers.<sup>18</sup> And they paid him warm public tribute. Likewise, the most important historian of ancient philosophy in the generation after theirs, E. Zeller, author of *The Philosophy of the Greeks* (1844–52) and *The Philosophy of the Greeks in Its Historical Development* (1855; several revised editions), was strongly influenced by Schleiermacher's work and wrote a warm tribute to it.<sup>19</sup>

Third, as has already been mentioned, like Schlegel and Hegel, Schleiermacher contributed to the growth of interest in medieval philosophy. He in particular devoted fairly extensive treatment to this subject in his lectures on the history of philosophy. After him, and in part thanks to his influence, interest in medieval philosophy would develop further during the nineteenth century, especially with Victor Cousin and his school in France, who, among other things, did important philosophical work on the medieval sources.

Fourth, in continuity with Schlegel, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics lectures (1805–33) developed a scrupulous general methodology for interpretation, which proved extremely influential and beneficial for work on the history of philosophy in particular. Like Schlegel's methodology, Schleiermacher's was largely motivated by the problem of the intellectual distance that usually separates an interpreter from an author and the natural tendency to misunderstanding that this creates. In response, Schleiermacher recommended that the interpreter take a broad range of careful measures. These included keeping the question of the author's meaning sharply separate from the question of its truth;<sup>20</sup> paying close

<sup>18</sup> To be a little more exact, Ritter and Brandis both often follow Schleiermacher's interpretations and evaluations closely (e.g., concerning the Platonic dialogues), but Ritter does so almost without exception, whereas Brandis is more independent-minded (e.g., unlike Ritter, who largely agrees with Schleiermacher's interpretation and extremely low assessment of Aristotle, Brandis does original scholarship on Aristotle and exalts him to equal status with Plato).

<sup>19</sup> E. Zeller, "Die Geschichte der alten Philosophie in den letztverflossenen 50 Jahren mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die neuesten Bearbeitungen derselben," *Jahrbücher der Gegenwart* 12 (1843), reprinted in his *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin, 1910), 1:29ff. Zeller was even more a follower of Hegel, though, whom he also discusses in this essay.

<sup>20</sup> As Émile Bréhier has pointed out, this vitally important interpretive principle had earlier precedents in Spinoza and Bayle. It is strikingly at odds with a prominent strand in Hegel's interpretive approach to the history of philosophy (as well as other areas of culture). It is also at odds with certain twentieth-century theories of interpretation both in the German tradition (especially Heidegger and Gadamer) and in the Anglophone (for example, Davidson).

attention to the author's historical context; identifying the patterns of word-use in the author's background language, as well as his distinctive modifications of them (since patterns of word-use *constitute* meanings or concepts); hypothesizing the nature of the author's distinctive psychology, as an aid to understanding his text; and deploying several sorts of holism in interpretation (for example, reading the parts of a text in light of the whole text, and the latter in light of the author's whole corpus, as well as paying attention to the author's whole psychology).<sup>21</sup>

These and other hermeneutic principles were subsequently rearticulated and further elaborated by Schleiermacher's students, often in application to work on the history of philosophy in particular. Thus Brandis in his *On the Concept of History of Philosophy* (1815) drew on Schleiermacher's hermeneutic principles in order to develop a methodology for history of philosophy,<sup>22</sup> as did Ritter in his *On the Education of the Philosopher through History of Philosophy* (1817).<sup>23</sup> And yet another of Schleiermacher's students, the eminent classical scholar A. Boeckh, gave a much more general and elaborate rearticulation of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics in his extremely influential *Encyclopedia and Methodology of the Philological Sciences* (delivered as lectures in 1809–66; published posthumously in 1877).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> F. Ast was another figure from the same period who, like Schleiermacher, was heavily involved not only in the theory of interpretation, but also in work on ancient philosophy (indeed, especially Plato) and on the history of philosophy more broadly. Ast tends to be remembered today merely as a follower of Schelling's metaphysics who on that basis rationalized an active projection of meaning onto texts (see, for example, Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, 57–9). However, he also espoused several principles of interpretation that were very similar to Schleiermacher's – for example, he too insisted on paying close attention to historical context, interpreting in the light of the author's psychology, and interpreting holistically. So in certain ways he played a significant supporting role in propagating Schleiermacher's interpretive approach.

<sup>22</sup> Brandis's central prescription is that the historian of philosophy should avoid assuming the truth of some philosophical system or other (e.g., Kant's) as a guide to interpreting and assessing positions in the history of philosophy and should also deemphasize the identification of merely causal factors contributing to their emergence, in the interest of instead providing an “internal” history that focuses on philosophers' own positions and arguments, and on their agreements and disagreements with each other. Brandis's debt to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is visible here in his sharp separation of questions about the meaning of philosophical positions from questions about their truth, as well as in his general concern to interpret philosophers' positions and arguments faithfully. His debt to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics becomes even clearer when he also insists on the importance of paying close heed to an author's historical context, taking into account the phenomenon of conceptual change, recognizing the dependence of thought on language, and therefore devoting scrupulous attention to an author's language (e.g., by developing and employing both general and author-specific dictionaries).

<sup>23</sup> For example, Ritter follows Schleiermacher in recommending interpretive holism as a way of ensuring the validity of the interpretation of a philosophical work, in emphasizing the central role of language in a philosopher's work and therefore in its interpretation, and in pointing out that a philosopher nonetheless constantly attempts to transcend the limits of his pre-given language, so that the interpreter needs to look beyond the “letter” of the philosopher's text to his “spirit.”

<sup>24</sup> Boeckh also incorporated a strong emphasis, more in the spirit of Schlegel than of Schleiermacher, on the importance and difficulty of identifying *genre* correctly.

Through the combined influence of Schleiermacher himself, Brandis, Ritter, and Boeckh, the hermeneutic principles in question would have an enormous and beneficial impact on the study of the history of philosophy in the nineteenth century. As might be expected given the main focus of their own work in the history of philosophy,<sup>25</sup> those principles were especially influential in the area of ancient philosophy. But they were also influential in other areas. For example, Schleiermacher's follower Dilthey applied this sort of scrupulous method to the interpretation of such modern philosophers as Hamann, Hegel, and Schleiermacher himself. Moreover, it would be no exaggeration to say that most of the best work that has been done in ancient philosophy and in other areas of the history of philosophy since the nineteenth century has to one degree or another been influenced and benefited by the Schlegel-Schleiermacher-Brandis-Ritter-Boeckh methodology of interpretation. Even to this day, it is one of the main virtues of German history of philosophy that it still tends to be strongly influenced by this methodology (despite the intervening influence on some German history of philosophy of contrary, and inferior, hermeneutic principles deriving from Heidegger and Gadamer).<sup>26</sup>

#### INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHIES OF PHILOSOPHERS: HAYM, DILTHEY, AND UNGER

Nineteenth-century German history of philosophy is best known for its panoramic sweeps (Tennemann, Überweg, Windelband, et al.). But an equally important genre from the period is the in-depth intellectual biography of an individual philosopher.

Haym was arguably the inventor of this genre, with his *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Life and Characteristic* (1856). He followed that with *Hegel and His Age* (1857), *The Romantic School* (1870) (an application of the same sort of approach to several members of the romantic movement together, in accordance with their own principle of *Symphilosophie*), and his masterpiece in this genre, *Herder in Accordance with His Life and Works* (1880). Dilthey was another important practitioner of this genre – especially in his massive biography of Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Life* (1870; materials toward a second volume were published posthumously), but also in his seminal work on the young Hegel, *The History of Hegel's Youth* (1905). Another, albeit less masterful, work in this genre is Unger's *Hamann and*

<sup>25</sup> Although Boeckh's classical scholarship was largely outside philosophy (especially in literature), it also included work on ancient philosophy, for example, studies on Philolaus and Plato's *Timaeus*.

<sup>26</sup> For some additional discussion of the hermeneutic dimension of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century history of philosophy, see Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte*, esp. 192ff.

the *Enlightenment* (1911). Fischer's work could also be classified as belonging to this genre.

This genre largely arose out of Schlegel and Schleiermacher's shared insistence on the importance of discovering the deeply individual psychology of an author, as revealed by his deeds and especially his texts taken as a whole. Accordingly, the first book in this genre, Haym's *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Life and Characteristic*, implicitly pays tribute to Schlegel's works undertaken in that spirit by using the word "Characteristic" in its title (the "characteristic" was a genre invented by Schlegel and his brother). And in the preface Haym explains the work's task as one of displaying its subject's psychological individuality, in particular by tracing his development – which is again precisely in the spirit of Schlegel's genre of "characteristic." Similarly, Dilthey in his biography of Schleiermacher closely conforms with Schleiermacher's own principle of the importance of identifying an author's psychological individuality (as well as with such additional principles from Schleiermacher as that it is necessary to base such an identification on a close examination of the author's deeds and especially works, to do so in a holistic or exhaustive manner, and to do so with a careful eye to his historical context).

This genre is quite distinctive as an approach to history of philosophy. For example, it is sharply at odds with Hegel's tendency in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* to play down the role of the philosopher's psychological individuality.<sup>27</sup> It is also at odds with Dilthey's own *later* approach to history of philosophy in *The Types of World Views and Their Unfoldment within the Metaphysical Systems* (1911), which neglects the individual psychology of philosophers in the interest of giving a very general typology and explanation of a few different sorts of philosophical outlooks.

The ultimate rationale for this genre is both more complicated and more compelling than it may appear at first sight (a fact that becomes clearer once the genre's source in Schlegel and Schleiermacher is recognized). The genre's purpose is not *only* to present a portrait of the author's individual psychology in its development (though that is certainly one important goal). It is also to furnish thereby an essential means for more adequately understanding his particular writings – in accordance with Schlegel and Schleiermacher's hermeneutic principle that it is necessary to identify an author's individual psychology in order to understand his works properly. In other words, the purpose of this genre is not just to do fine-grained psychology for its own sake (as its critics have often tended to assume), but also to afford thereby the sort of psychological insight into the

<sup>27</sup> Concerning this tendency, cf. W. H. Walsh, "Hegel on the History of Philosophy," in *The Historiography of the History of Philosophy*, ed. J. Passmore (The Hague, 1965), 76.

author that will enable one to understand his texts properly. Accordingly, Haym emphasizes this additional motive toward the end of his Humboldt biography, as does Dilthey in the preface of his Schleiermacher biography.<sup>28</sup>

Several of the examples of this genre listed earlier are arguably very successful in achieving both of these purposes (for example, Haym's biography of Herder).

### HEGEL AGAIN

We have already encountered some of Hegel's most influential and important contributions to history of philosophy. One was his ambitious teleological picture of the history of philosophy, and of history generally, which motivated many of the nineteenth century's "official" histories of philosophy. Another was his recognition of the value of the skeptical side of ancient philosophy, including not only ancient skepticism proper, but also skeptical aspects of the Sophistic movement and of Plato; his perception of the superiority of these more radical ancient forms of skepticism over tamer modern forms; and his insight that such radical skepticism was an essential preparation for the more constructive side of ancient philosophy (e.g., Sophistic skepticism for the constructive philosophies of Plato and Aristotle).

But Hegel also made several further important contributions to history of philosophy, which should now be sketched. Two of these concern additional ways of interpreting, and finding merit in, the history of ancient philosophy. First, Hegel, guided in part by a distinctive feature of his own philosophical position (its accordance of central importance to "the Concept"), discovered a new way of interpreting, and of perceiving value in, the tradition of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle: Socrates turned people's attention away from particulars toward concepts, or universals; Plato then explored the relations between, and the ultimate unity of, concepts; finally, Aristotle developed a position that subordinated everything to concepts.

<sup>28</sup> R. Haym, *Wilhelm von Humboldt: Lebensbild und Charakteristik* (Berlin, 1856), 631–2; W. Dilthey, *Leben Schleiermachers* (Berlin, 1966), 1:xxxiii; cf. his "Archive der Literatur in ihrer Bedeutung für das Studium der Geschichte der Philosophie," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 2 (1889). It might be objected that adding this further purpose entails a problem of vicious circularity, since the psychological portrait in question is supposed to be arrived at largely on the basis of interpretations of particular texts. However, the hermeneutic tradition that lies behind this genre had itself identified such circularity as a normal feature of interpretation and had argued convincingly that it was not in fact vicious. The proposed solution fundamentally turned on the observation that understanding is not an all-or-nothing matter, but rather something that develops in degrees – so that it is possible to achieve a certain level of understanding of an author's texts even before developing a psychological portrait of him, which can then be used in order to construct the latter, which will then be available in order to refine the understanding of his texts, which can then be used to refine the psychological portrait, and so on, indefinitely.

This historical schema constitutes a genuinely illuminating way of interpreting the stretch of ancient philosophy in question, and a powerful argument for its importance. The schema is similar to, and broadly compatible with, Schleiermacher's account of Socrates' importance, but also in certain ways richer.<sup>29</sup> It constitutes a case for the importance of this whole stretch of ancient philosophy that is as powerful as Schlegel's very different case for Plato's importance.<sup>30</sup> The schema was subsequently taken over from Hegel by Zeller (along with many interpretive details).<sup>31</sup>

Second, Hegel also developed a cogent broader case for Aristotle's importance as a philosopher. As was mentioned previously, Aristotle's reputation as a philosopher had been in steep decline since the time of Descartes and had recently been dealt a further severe blow by the Schlegels' attack on his authority concerning literature. Also, Schleiermacher now held him in especially low esteem, both as an interpreter of his predecessors and as a philosopher (regarding him as a crude empiricist). In one respect Hegel contributed to this trend, namely, by challenging Aristotle's authority in the one area of theoretical philosophy where it had seemed safe: logic. But for the most part Hegel rather worked against this trend, by identifying a number of important virtues in Aristotle's thought and hence restoring Aristotle to a central place in the history of philosophy.

One of these virtues has just been touched on: Aristotle's focus on and exaltation of concepts, or universals. Another had already been hinted at by Schlegel in his Cologne lectures of 1804–6: Aristotle's account in *Metaphysics*, book Lambda, of divine *nous* as thought that thinks itself and that thereby overcomes the distinction

<sup>29</sup> The greater richness lies mainly in two features: (1) Hegel's recognition that a fundamental part of Socrates' achievement was to have succeeded in identifying concepts as a subject matter distinguishable from particulars for the first time and (2) Hegel's extension of the schema to cover Plato and Aristotle as well.

<sup>30</sup> It is striking and noteworthy that all three of these interpretive approaches work by identifying something in the ancients that corresponds to a central principle of the interpreter's own philosophical position (whichever may have occurred first in the interpreter – a question that, at least in the case of Schlegel and Hegel, would be difficult to answer). Thus Schlegel's interpretation of Plato corresponds to his own romantic ideal of an endless striving for knowledge, Schleiermacher's interpretation of Socrates corresponds to his own broadly Kantian concern with the limits of knowledge and conceptualization, and Hegel's interpretation of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle corresponds to his own metaphysical principle, "the Concept."

<sup>31</sup> It is true that Zeller greatly enriched Hegel's interpretation of ancient philosophy by drawing on the work of Schleiermacher and his pupils as well. It is also true that Zeller in his later work increasingly distanced himself from Hegel in various ways (for example, while he had always rejected Hegel's correlation of the stages of the history of philosophy with the categories of the Logic, he now in addition became more stridently opposed to a teleological conception of the history of philosophy, more interested in identifying the efficient causes of philosophical views, and more concerned with such aspects of philological methodology as the need to fill evidential gaps in the historical record by means of cautious hypotheses – in short, more natural-scientific in his approach). Nonetheless, the main lines of Zeller's interpretation of the history of ancient philosophy remained recognizably Hegelian.

between thought and object. Hegel makes much of this account, plausibly seeing it as an anticipation of his own highest philosophical principle, Absolute Spirit, which is likewise characterized by self-knowledge and an overcoming of the thought-object distinction. Accordingly, Hegel has his own Philosophy of Spirit in the *Encyclopedia* (1817–30) culminate with a long quotation from Aristotle on this subject. This might strike us today as merely a case of one heady metaphysician admiring another. However, as I have argued in other work, there is also a less obvious and more interesting dimension to the anticipation that Hegel sees here: already in Aristotle this principle implicitly served the purpose of answering *skeptical* threats (from the Sophists), just as Hegel's own principle is intended to do.<sup>32</sup> Yet another important virtue that Hegel identifies in Aristotle lies in his anti-dualistic philosophy of mind in *De Anima*. In the *Encyclopedia* Hegel indeed touts Aristotle's work in the philosophy of mind as the most important work done on the subject before his own, largely because of its antidualistic character.

It was in large part thanks to Hegel's perception of great value in Aristotle's philosophy that subsequent nineteenth-century historians of philosophy likewise saw it as valuable and devoted much attention to it. Thus, Brandis broke with his teacher Schleiermacher's very low estimation of Aristotle and did original work on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; Zeller likewise ascribed great importance to Aristotle generally and to the *Metaphysics* in particular (moreover, closely following Hegel in many points of interpretive detail);<sup>33</sup> Prantl did seminal work on Aristotle's logic; and shortly after the turn of the twentieth century Jaeger published his pathbreaking work on the chronological development of Aristotle's thought. Aristotle's secure place in history of philosophy *since* the nineteenth century can in no small part be traced back to Hegel's rehabilitation of him as well.

Two further important contributions that Hegel made to history of philosophy concern its general methodology. The first of these is significant in part because it constitutes one cogent rationale for doing history of philosophy at all. Hegel's official approach of interpreting the history of philosophy in light of the structure of his own Logic in a way uses present philosophy in order to understand past philosophy. But Hegel also believes that illumination works in the other direction: *that one can only fully comprehend present philosophy in light of its development out of past philosophies*. We have already encountered a version of this idea in Schlegel's Cologne lectures of 1804–6, where he calls in this spirit for a "genetic explanation of current philosophy." Hegel articulates his own version

<sup>32</sup> See my "Hat jede wahre Philosophie eine skeptische Seite?" in *Skeptizismus und Metaphysik* = *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Sonderband 28, ed. M. Gabriel (Berlin, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Concerning Brandis and Zeller, cf. W.-R. Mann, "The Origins of Modern Historiography of Philosophy," *History and Theory* 35 (1996), and S. Menn, "Zeller and the Debates about Aristotle's *Metaphysics*," in *Eduard Zeller*, ed. G. Hartung (Berlin, 2010).

of it in the introduction to his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. As he hints there, like Schlegel's version, it is a special application of Herder's revolutionary "genetic method": Herder's approach of explaining later intellectual and cultural phenomena in terms of their development out of earlier ones.<sup>34</sup>

Hegel's application of this method promises to explain not only his own philosophical position in terms of its development out of its antecedents, but also earlier philosophical positions in terms of their development out of theirs. For example, as has been mentioned, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* he argues, quite plausibly, that the great systematic philosophies of Plato and Aristotle emerged as reactions against the Sophistic movement. And both there and in the "Self-consciousness" chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) he tries to show, again plausibly, that sociopolitical oppression in the ancient world led to Stoicism's theoretical separation of the individual and his thought from outer reality, which then generated Skepticism, which then in turn generated as a response the otherworldly outlook of Neoplatonism (and Christianity).

How exactly does this sort of approach promise to increase comprehension? It does so in at least three distinguishable ways: First, the very demonstration that philosophical concepts and principles have developed out of antecedents (rather than, say, having been present to the human mind at all times and places, or having emerged at some point in time *ex nihilo*) itself constitutes a sort of increment in their comprehension. Second, so too does the demonstration of what specifically that development has been. Third, the specific developmental account given is likely to enhance comprehension in yet further ways as well. For example, it might turn out, as Hegel indeed officially holds, that the account shows our present philosophical outlook to be the culmination of a historical series of philosophical outlooks that have in each case (except the first) been increasingly rational, because increasingly consistent, responses to preceding philosophical outlooks that were rationally problematic because afflicted by

<sup>34</sup> Hegel writes: "There are various aspects under which the history of philosophy may possess interest. We shall find the central point of this interest in the essential connection existing between what is apparently past and the present stage reached by philosophy. . . . The acts of thought appear at first to be a matter of history, and, therefore, things of the past, and outside of real existence. But in reality we are what we are through history: . . . in the present, what we have as a permanent possession is essentially bound up with our place in history. The possession of self-conscious reason . . . did not arise suddenly, nor did it grow only from the soil of the present. This possession must be regarded . . . as an inheritance, and as the result of labor – the labor of all past generations of men. Just as the arts of outward life, the accumulated skill and invention, the customs and arrangements of social and political life, are the result of the thought, care, and needs, of the want and the misery, of the ingenuity, the plans and achievements of those who preceded us in history, so, likewise, in science, and especially in philosophy, do we owe what we are to the tradition which, as Herder has put it, like a holy chain, runs through all that was transient, and has therefore passed away. Thus has been preserved and transmitted to us what antiquity produced" (G. W. F. Hegel, *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, ed. J. G. Gray [New York, 1970], 210–11).



self-contradictions. Or (to consider a very different possibility) it might turn out, as Nietzsche holds, that such modern moral values, shared by many modern philosophers, as love, forgiveness, sympathy, and pity, were originally the results of an inversion of contrary Greek and Roman values undertaken in late antiquity by people whom the Greeks and Romans had oppressed and motivated by hatred and resentment toward them, and that this original motive of hatred and resentment still lies at the root of those modern values, which are therefore in a way still self-contradictory.

This whole genealogical reason for pursuing history of philosophy continued to play an important role for Nietzsche (as the example just mentioned illustrates). It also did so for some of the nineteenth century's more academic historians of philosophy. For example, it plays a significant role in Röth's *History of Our Western Philosophy*, and it forms a large part of Windelband's rationale for doing history of philosophy (according to Windelband, we especially come to understand our own conceptual resources better when we discover how they emerged in the history of philosophy).

A final important contribution that Hegel makes to history of philosophy concerns the relation between philosophy and the broader culture within which it arises, including art, religion, and sociopolitical institutions. Hegel's general view is that the two sides are intimately connected. Indeed, according to his official position in the late *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, when a nation plays its role in world history there is always just a single fundamental principle that animates all of these areas of culture in common and that merely finds its highest manifestation in philosophy. This may well be to develop the idea of an intimate connection in a way that is too extreme to be plausible. But if so, the idea itself, and also many of the more specific ways in which Hegel applies it, arguably remain valuable and important. Let me therefore mention three more specific sorts of intimate connection that he discusses at one point or another and illustrates with interesting concrete examples.<sup>35</sup>

One very interesting sort of intimate connection (similar in spirit to the doctrine of a single principle, but more limited in scope) is already discussed by Hegel in *The Difference Between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy* (1801) and *Faith and Knowledge* (1802). There he interprets the modern subjectivist philosophies of Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi as symptoms of a broader cultural

<sup>35</sup> Walsh in "Hegel on the History of Philosophy," 75, criticizes Hegel in this connection for failing to provide concrete examples. But it seems to me that he does provide them, if one looks in the right places.

pathology of dualism, including in particular subject-object dualism, which he considers distinctive of modern Europe.<sup>36</sup>

A second sort of intimate connection is treated by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There the account that he gives of the various “shapes of consciousness,” or very general outlooks, that have occurred over the course of history, arising out of each other, sometimes accords a leading role to philosophy (for example, in “Stoicism” and “Skepticism”), but sometimes to another area of culture (for example, the socioeconomic sphere in “Lordship and Bondage,” religion in “Unhappy Consciousness,” natural science in “Observing Reason,” and literature in “The Law of the Heart”). This approach carries at least two important implications: first, that philosophy’s characteristic functions are often performed by other areas of culture, and, second, that philosophy and other areas of culture often influence each other deeply. Taking these two points to heart would arguably forestall a number of common errors in history of philosophy.<sup>37</sup>

A third sort of intimate connection concerns philosophy’s relations to the social, economic, and political spheres. Already in the early theological writings of the 1790s Hegel attempted to explain ethical and religious outlooks in terms of the social, economic, and political contexts within which they emerged. For example, in *The Spirit of Christianity*, he tried to explain the divine-command form of the Ten Commandments in terms of the ancient Hebrews’ having previously been habituated to obey commands by their enslavement in Egypt. And in *The Positivity of the Christian Religion*, he tried to explain Christianity’s other-worldism in terms of social, economic, and political oppression in the Roman world, and its victims’ natural impulse to attempt to flee from such oppression. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of 1807, he extended this sort of explanation to philosophical positions as well. For example, in the “Self-consciousness” chapter, he explains Stoicism’s theoretical separation of the individual subject and his thought from the real world, Skepticism’s subsequent intellectual destruction of the real world in response, and Neoplatonism and Christianity’s (“Unhappy

<sup>36</sup> Concerning Hegel’s account of this broader cultural pathology, see my *Hegel’s Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago, 1998), chap. 2.

<sup>37</sup> For example, concerning the first point: the fact that Greek tragedy was already engaged in sophisticated reflection on moral matters before the major Greek philosophers were and that the philosophers’ moral theories therefore constantly engaged with the views of their tragedian predecessors in explicit and implicit ways shows that the common approach among historians of ancient philosophy of considering the philosophers’ moral theories in isolation is deeply flawed. And concerning the second point: the fact that many of our modern common sense assumptions about the nature of the mind had their original source in a Pythagorean-Platonic-Christian philosophical tradition of dualistic theorizing about the mind shows that the later Wittgenstein’s picture that common sense is uncorrupted by philosophy and consequently all right as it is, whereas philosophy constitutes a discrete sphere of intellectual pathology, is deeply misguided.

Consciousness's") reaction to Skepticism of positing a remote otherworld in terms of an original experience of slavery and oppression that had occurred in the ancient world ("Lordship and Bondage"), which caused this chain of theories to arise as strategies of withdrawal from an unbearable reality. And in the section "Legal Status," he develops this account a little further by explaining Stoicism and Skepticism in the Roman Empire as responses to the alienation that the individual experienced there as a result of his subjection to a remote, despotic emperor and a system of abstract laws.<sup>38</sup> This whole proto-Marxist approach to the history of culture generally and philosophy in particular is especially salient in Hegel's earlier works (less so in his later ones). It is of great value not the least because it helped to stimulate Marx's own theory of culture generally and philosophy in particular as socioeconomically rooted ideology (Marx had encountered it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*).

#### POSITIVISM: COMTE, FEUERBACH, MARX, DILTHEY, AND NIETZSCHE

The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with what might be called "critical approaches" to the history of philosophy, for, in addition to the great "official" histories of philosophy from the period encouraged by the progressive accounts of the history of philosophy in Kant and Hegel, and the various new approaches to the subject due to Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Haym, Dilthey, and Hegel, one of the most striking aspects of work on the history of philosophy in the nineteenth century is the proliferation of important new lines of negative criticism of the philosophical tradition.

One critical movement – anticipated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the British Empiricists, as well as Condillac and Condorcet in France, and strongly influenced by them – was positivism, the position that history is a progressive process in which both religion and philosophy eventually give way to, and find their only real value in, strict empirical science. The French thinker Comte (1798–1857) developed the first and most influential version of such a position in his *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830–42). There he articulated an a priori "law of the three stages," according to which each science develops through three stages: theological, then metaphysical, and finally positive (or properly scientific). The implication of this model was that, like religion, most philosophy had been merely a remote and error-bound preparation for strict empirical science. However, within the history of philosophy, Comte also distinguished a

<sup>38</sup> Hegel basically still retains this sort of account of Hellenistic philosophy in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

narrow tradition of thinkers who had contributed the most to achieving this goal, including Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, and himself. One historian of philosophy who shortly afterward attempted to develop the implications of Comte's position for the history of philosophy in greater detail was the Englishman G. H. Lewes, in *A Biographical History of Philosophy from Its Origins in Greece Down to the Present Day* (1845).

After Comte, several interesting variations on the theme of positivism appeared in Germany. One of these was due to Feuerbach (1804–72). In works from the early 1840s, such as *The Essence of Christianity* and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, Feuerbach explained both religion and Hegelian philosophy as realms of illusion produced by distortions of basic empirical facts, and as destined to be eliminated in favor of a properly empirical position.

A closely related, and more important, variation was then developed by Marx (1818–83). Marx's materialist theory of history, as he began to formulate it in the mid-1840s, similarly identified both religion and philosophy (again saliently including Hegelian philosophy), as well as several further areas of culture, as realms of illusion. But in a major new twist, his theory also sought to explain the emergence of these illusions in terms of their serving particular socioeconomic class interests to the disadvantage of others, posited an empirical law of socioeconomic development over the course of history toward the eventual attainment of a classless society, and, accordingly, foresaw the eventual elimination of the illusions in question in such a society, which would substitute for them a properly scientific view of the world instead.<sup>39</sup>

Another interesting variation was developed by Dilthey (1833–1911). Like Comte (as well as Feuerbach and Marx), Dilthey in his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883) gives an account of the history of philosophy that interprets much of the philosophical tradition, saliently including the more metaphysical and teleological aspects of Hegel's philosophy, as merely a sort of continuation of religious illusions by other means, which along with religion is destined to give way to strict science. However, Dilthey drops Comte's idea of an a priori law of progress. And his conception of the nature of the strict science in question is also significantly different from Comte's. In particular, unlike Comte, he distinguishes sharply between the central method of the natural sciences (the discovery of causal laws) and that of the human sciences (the interpretation of linguistic and other types of meaningful expressions). And he accords a large role in

<sup>39</sup> Concerning the Comtean roots of Feuerbach's and Marx's positions, cf. E. Kamenka, "Marxism and the History of Philosophy," in *Historiography of the History of Philosophy*, ed. Passmore. Note that although Feuerbach and Marx both make Hegel a central target of attack, they also self-consciously borrow a lot from him, in particular, ideas from the "Lordship and Bondage" and "Unhappy Consciousness" sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

science to the discipline of psychology (whereas Comte had in effect distributed psychology's functions between biology and sociology).

Yet another interesting German variation on the theme of positivism was developed by Nietzsche (1844–1900).<sup>40</sup> In *Twilight of the Idols* (1888) Nietzsche argues in a positivist vein: “Today we possess science precisely to the extent to which we have decided to accept the testimony of the senses – to the extent to which we sharpen them further, arm them, and have learned to think them through. The rest is miscarriage and not-yet-science – in other words, metaphysics, theology, psychology, epistemology – or formal science, such as logic and ... mathematics.”<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, in a section of the same work titled “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable” and subtitled “The History of an Error,” he sketches a sort of progressive history of philosophy in a positivist spirit: His history begins with Plato’s version of otherworldism, according to which the philosopher has cognitive access to a posited otherworld of forms. It then proceeds to Christianity’s version of otherworldism, in which the otherworld is unattainable for now but held out in prospect for the virtuous in the future. It then advances to the still more skeptical version of otherworldism found in Kant, for whom the otherworld is cognitively unattainable and not even promised. It then proceeds to an outlook that is agnostic about the very existence of an otherworld (“The cock crow of positivism”). Finally, it concludes with a position that actually rejects the notion of an otherworld as groundless and useless, thereby leaving *this* world as no longer mere appearance, but instead the only world there is.<sup>42</sup>

These various forms of positivism constitute an important family of theories, which has grown still larger since the nineteenth century (for example, with the emergence of logical positivism). Their common implication for the history of philosophy is that, like religion, most past philosophy has been little more than a sort of remote and misguided preparation for strict science (with only a few past philosophies constituting something better than that) and is accordingly destined to give way to the latter. However, as can be seen even from the brief sketch given here, this family of theories incorporates considerable disagreements about the methods and the scope of the strict science in question, as well as about the evidence for, and the character of, the progress that is allegedly leading up to it. And such disagreements entail corresponding disagreements about the details of the history of philosophy implied.

<sup>40</sup> Despite his notorious objections in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874) to the nineteenth century’s obsession with history, including history of philosophy, Nietzsche made several important contributions to the latter subject.

<sup>41</sup> *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. W. Kaufmann (New York, 1954), 481.

<sup>42</sup> *The Portable Nietzsche*, 485–6.

LINGUISTIC ERROR THEORIES: GRUPPE,  
NIETZSCHE, AND MAUTHNER

Another important critical approach to the history of philosophy that developed during the nineteenth century sought to diagnose much past philosophy as the result of errors concerning language.

This approach had already been pioneered in the seventeenth century by English philosophers such as Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke. And it had been pushed further in the eighteenth century by Herder and Hamann in Germany, especially in their respective *Metacritiques*, which brought it to bear against Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, though also in other texts and against other philosophers. The types of linguistic error that Herder and Hamann had identified in previous philosophers included failing to recognize the essential dependence of thought and concepts on language; violating a principle that all linguistic meanings, or concepts, must be based on sensations (albeit sometimes via metaphorical extensions); hypostatizing what are really only collections of activities, on the basis of a misleading grammatical analogy between the terms used to describe them and names for objects (e.g., "Reason"); and finally, violating the specific implications of linguistic terms in ways that generate implicit self-contradictions (e.g., "causa sui").

In the nineteenth century the today largely forgotten philosopher Gruppe (1804–76) sought to extend this sort of linguistic critique to the history of philosophy more broadly. Gruppe's most important work in this connection is *Antaeus: A Correspondence about Speculative Philosophy in Its Conflict with Science and Language* (1831). There, under the acknowledged strong influence of Herder (as well as several other thinkers who had been strongly influenced by Herder, such as Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt), Gruppe sets out from a discussion of Hegel's famous Berlin lectures on the history of philosophy (which had not yet been published at the time) but then develops a radically critical rival version of the subject, in which Hegel himself becomes a major target. Gruppe interprets much of the history of philosophy as founded on the sorts of errors concerning language that were mentioned earlier, as well as several further ones (e.g., a propagation of pseudoetymologies). He is especially concerned to criticize positions in the history of philosophy that have ascribed a governing function to thought (in violation of the principle of thought's dependence on language) and positions that have accorded conceptual abstractions (fine in themselves in Gruppe's view, indeed an essential part of language) independence or priority vis-à-vis sensory experience (in violation of the principle that concepts must be based on sensations or metaphorical extensions therefrom). For Gruppe, Hegel is a sort of paradigm of these and other linguistic errors (though whether

Hegel is well chosen for this role is quite doubtful, since he was in fact himself deeply indebted to Herder and took over many of Herder's positions concerning language). Guided by the criterion of whether philosophers have succumbed to such linguistic errors or instead avoided and opposed them, Gruppe constructs a sort of two-track account of the history of philosophy: First, there have been "speculative" philosophers, including the Eleatics, Plato, Aristotle, the Medieval Realists, and the post-Kantian German Idealists (especially Hegel), all of whom in Gruppe's view were deeply confused about language. Second, though, there has also been the noble tradition of the Medieval Nominalists, Bacon, Locke, and Herder, all of whom for the most part avoided, and indeed fought against, such confusions about language.

This way of reading the history of philosophy was subsequently taken over to a large extent by Nietzsche and Mauthner (1849–1923). For them, the central linguistic error involved was that of hypostatizing what are in fact merely collections of activities or sensations: treating these as things. According to the specific version of this critique that Nietzsche develops in such works as *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *Twilight of the Idols* (1888), it has been a central error of many philosophers to posit imaginary entities over and above activities or sensations – for example, God, substances, selves, the will – and this is an error into which they have been seduced by the distinctive *subject*-predicate structure of Indo-European languages. By contrast, Nietzsche praises philosophers such as Heraclitus and the Sophists who have tended to resist such hypostatizations.

Mauthner in his *Contributions to a Critique of Language* (1902) and *Dictionary of Philosophy* (1910) offers a critical account of the history of philosophy that is very similar to Nietzsche's. Mauthner is strongly influenced here not only by Nietzsche, but also by Herder, Hamann (whom he especially admires), and the early linguists who had followed in their train.

This tradition of interpreting the history of philosophy as largely a series of errors concerning language would be continued in a striking way in the twentieth century by the later Wittgenstein (who had read Mauthner's *Contributions* early in his career). The later Wittgenstein indeed tends to characterize the *whole* of the history of philosophy as a series of confusions about language. On Wittgenstein's account, the error of false hypostatization continues to play a central role (e.g., in connection with philosophers' misguided conceptions of "meaning" as an object, rather than as the use of words). But Wittgenstein also subsumes that error under a broader class of what he calls "grammatical" confusions – that is, roughly, misunderstandings of the character of the rules (the "grammar") that constitute language, especially misunderstandings caused by superficial resemblances between one area of language and another (e.g., in the case just mentioned, the superficial resemblance between a word like "meaning" and a general name for a type of object like "cow").

Wittgenstein's extreme picture of the *whole* of the history of philosophy as a series of confusions about language is no doubt exaggerated (Wittgenstein did not know a great deal about the history of philosophy and overgeneralized on the basis of what he did know). But what is more striking is how much of the history of the subject *can* be plausibly explained in such terms. For example, as I have argued in other work, two central positions of Plato's that not only constituted the core of his own philosophy but also exercised an enormous influence on the subsequent history of the subject can largely be traced back to errors about language: (1) *The theory of forms* arose partly from a false assimilation of expressions like *hê hosiotês* and to *hosion* (piety) to singular referring terms that pick out objects (a confusion encouraged by the linguistic accident of their strong resemblance to such terms as well as by a common Greek practice of describing all words as *onomata*, "names"), and partly from Plato's lack of a distinction between sense and referent (the conflation of which evidently led him to the implicit line of thought: since an adjective such as *hosios* [pious] has just a single sense, but the people and acts, or the objects, to which it refers are multiple, there must be *another, single* object to which it more properly refers, i.e., the form). (2) *The Socratic "What is X?" question*, with its dubious implicit assumption that *in order to understand any general term one must have a definition for it, that is, a set of nontrivial, essential necessary and sufficient conditions of application*, probably arose in large part through a hasty generalization from the fact that there really are *some* general terms of which that is true (e.g., in order to understand the general term "bachelor" one must know that a bachelor is an *unmarried man*).<sup>43</sup> These two mistakes were subsequently repeated by other philosophers, including Aristotle, and went on to enjoy long careers in philosophy, even down to the present day.

#### THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AS PSYCHOLOGICAL PATHOLOGY: NIETZSCHE AGAIN

Nietzsche also developed the important position that like the history of religion, the history of philosophy has largely consisted of errors arising from a sort of psychological pathology and therefore requires an account that not only refutes the errors but also provides a psychological diagnosis of them. This is his approach to the history of philosophy in *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example.

This approach constitutes a sort of continuation, but also a distinctive elaboration, of the interest in the individual psychologies of philosophers that we encountered in Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Haym, and Dilthey.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See my "Socrates' Demand for Definitions," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 31 (2006): 1–47.

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche's early *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (written 1872–3 but not published by him) constitutes a more immediate link with their work, in that it adopts their focus on philosophers'



Nietzsche's accounts of Socrates and Plato are good examples of his distinctive approach. In such works as *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Twilight of the Idols* he explains Socrates' indulgence in endless reasoning, and his anticipation of the Christian inversion of Greek and Roman values (for example, his opposition to the traditional Greek value of revenge in the *Crito*), as expressions of a *ressentiment* that he felt against social superiors (Socrates was himself from a humble background but mainly mixed with young aristocrats).<sup>45</sup> And he explains Plato's otherworldism (the theory of separate forms, etc.) as a sort of slandering of *this* world – effected by displacing value away from it onto the otherworld, so that it is represented negatively in comparison with the latter – that was motivated by Plato's disappointment with it.<sup>46</sup>

The plausibility of these two explanations is interestingly mixed. On the negative side, while Socrates' relatively low social status in comparison with his aristocratic associates tends to support Nietzsche's explanation, there is little or no further evidence in the surviving texts that he harbored a sense of social inferiority or resentment because of it and considerable evidence to the contrary. However, on the positive side, there is copious evidence that Plato was indeed deeply disenchanted with this world, both in general and above all politically – for example, his disparaging characterization of this world and valorization of death in the *Phaedo*, his dismay at the execution of his hero Socrates in the *Apology*, his disgust with democratic political life in the *Republic*, his position as an aristocrat in an age of popular democracy, and the failure of his political plans both in Athens and in Syracuse. So, while one of Nietzsche's psychological explanations seems rather far-fetched, the other seems very plausible.

Another philosopher to whom Nietzsche applies this sort of explanation with considerable plausibility is Kant. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche characterizes Kant, with his continuation of the Christian distinction between a "true" and an "apparent" world, as "in the end, an underhanded Christian"; in *The Will to Power* he makes the related observation that Kant in his moral philosophy "'falsifies' things and thoughts at which he has arrived in another way by imposing on them a false arrangement of deduction and dialectic." Such characterizations of Kant as someone who (self-)deceptively presents as reasons what are really only rationalizations for received views to which he is already committed arguably succeed in identifying one of the more dubious psychological motives behind

individual psychologies, but without yet incorporating Nietzsche's later distinctive emphasis on pathology. It can be seen from his treatment of Socrates in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) that he was already interested in pathological cases, however.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche's explanation here is analogous to the one that he gives of the similar inversion of values by the first Christians.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche's explanation here is analogous to the one that he gives of the similar otherworldism of Christianity.

his philosophy (in addition to his quasi-Christian otherworldism and his moral philosophy, one might also explain his attempts to provide a priori vindications of the received science of his day in this way).<sup>47</sup>

There are several features of Nietzsche's general approach here that deserve mention, since they tend to enhance its viability: First, like many German philosophers before him, he believes that much of what goes on in the mind, including much of what is most important, is *unconscious* (Freud did not invent that view but merely inherited it, indeed largely from Nietzsche himself). Accordingly, his explanations of philosophers' dubious theories in terms of pathological motives (such as the ones he attributes to Socrates, Plato, and Kant) are not restricted to conscious motives but include *unconscious* ones as well. His inclusion of the latter significantly increases both the plausibility and the interest of his approach. Second, he does not deny, implausibly, that philosophers of whom he holds a more positive view – for example, Heraclitus, the Sophists, and himself – *also* have psychological motives that go beyond mere discovery of the truth. On the contrary, he emphasizes that they always do. For him, the relevant contrast in the history of philosophy is therefore not one between philosophers who only aspire to the truth and philosophers who have other motives, but rather one between philosophers whose views derive from healthy motives and philosophers whose views derive from pathological ones. This could again be seen as a strength in his position. Third, he is generally careful to avoid what has become known as the “genetic fallacy”: the fallacy of inferring from a belief's pathological source to its falsehood. This is another virtue in his position.

Nietzsche's incorporation into history of philosophy of the diagnosis of psychological pathology arguably constitutes an important and enriching development.

#### PHILOSOPHY AS IDEOLOGY: MARX AGAIN

A final important critical approach to the history of philosophy that emerged during the nineteenth century was Marx's interpretation of much of the history of philosophy as ideology.

The general theory of ideology – as Marx develops it in such texts as the *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), *The German Ideology* (1845–6), and the preface of *Toward a*

<sup>47</sup> This sort of explanation might seem implausible because of Kant's official strong moral stance against lying. However, it should be noted that Nietzsche is as much concerned with *unconscious* as with conscious motives here. Moreover, if anyone doubts that Kant had any tendencies to (self-)deception, he should consider the peculiar case of Kant's anti-semitism: his combination of a relatively respectful treatment of Judaism in his published works, as well as polite, or even friendly, relations with individual Jews (e.g., Mendelssohn and Herz), on the one hand, with expressions of some appalling anti-semitic views in the more private context of his lectures (e.g., the lectures on ethics) and his letters to fellow Christians (e.g., Reinhold), on the other.

*Critique of Political Economy* (1859) – explains many of the false beliefs that predominate in such areas of culture as religion, philosophy, politics, law, and art as generated by, and serving the interests of, particular socioeconomic classes in their competition with other classes. Usually it is the ruling class and its interests that are in question here, since, according to Marx, these generate the ruling ideas in a society.

Marx's theory is sharply different from a theory that traces such false beliefs back to individual psychological pathology, for it is a crucial feature of his theory that it does not claim that the thinker who invents an ideology that stands in the service of a certain class's interests will always consciously, or even unconsciously, identify with those interests (indeed, his own motives might even be contrary to them).<sup>48</sup>

The paradigmatic area of ideology for Marx is religion. According to his account of the Christian religion as an ideology, the illusions of Christianity misrepresent the degrading condition in which the working class lives as a sort of metaphysical necessity and offer the working class imaginary consolations in the form of supposed rewards in heaven. In both of these ways, they reconcile the working class to its degrading condition and thereby serve the interests of the capitalist class that profits from it.

Marx extended this general type of account to much philosophy as well. Already in the *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"* (1843) he interprets Hegel's political philosophy, with its purported deduction of the (in Marx's view) invidious socio-political institutions of the modern state from the categories of the Logic, as an exercise in the ideological rationalization and hence support of those institutions. (He says that Hegel's deduction of them from the Logic provides them with "a philosophical form, a philosophical certification.") In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844), while Marx praises Hegel for providing in the "Lordship and Bondage" and "Unhappy Consciousness" sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* anticipations of his own conception that labor, or socioeconomic life, molds people and their ideas and that the Christian God and heaven are merely an illusory projection adopted by people in a condition of socioeconomic degradation, he also criticizes Hegel for reinstating God in the larger account that frames those particular sections, namely, in the form of Absolute Spirit, and for thereby in effect perpetuating Christian religious ideology. In *The German Ideology* (1845–6) Marx then goes on to interpret additional philosophical positions such as Kant's theory of morality in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Destutt de Tracy's equation of

<sup>48</sup> There are, however, interesting questions concerning how an ideology is supposed to relate to individual psychology more broadly. For example, it might plausibly be argued that Marx's theory requires that at least *some* of the adherents of an ideology must psychologically identify with the class interests in question.

the individual with property, and utilitarianism as likewise ideologies that serve the class interests of the bourgeoisie at the expense of the working class.

While Marx tends to focus in this connection on philosophical positions from his own period or shortly before, this sort of account of philosophy as ideology could plausibly be applied to many earlier and later positions in philosophy as well. For example, Aristotle's dubious theory in the *Politics* that some men have slavish natures served the ideological function of reinforcing the interests of the slave-owning class in the ancient world at the expense of the slaves. And the striking popularity in the United States of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, with its intellectually feeble derivation from the thought-experiment of the "original position" of the "maxi-min principle," according to which inequalities in the distribution of goods are justified to the extent that they cause the least advantaged to be better off than they would be without the inequalities,<sup>49</sup> is readily explicable in terms of the ideological function served by this theory as a rationalization of the gross inequalities of American capitalism.<sup>50</sup>

But it could also be argued that the full potential of Marx's theory of ideology as a tool for understanding the history of culture generally, and philosophy in particular, is far greater than this yet suggests. The key to releasing the theory's full potential would be to drop Marx's restriction of it to socioeconomic class interests, to recognize that it can equally well be applied to group interests of other sorts, which similarly generate their self-serving illusions – for example, gender interests, national interests, and species interests.

For instance, concerning gender: When Aristotle argues in the *Politics* that the female is naturally inferior to the male and that the female therefore ought to be governed by the male, this is a false ideological rationalization of the sort of gender oppression that prevailed in ancient Greece. And a similar point applies when Kant argues in *The Metaphysics of Morals* that all women are unfit to vote because their preservation depends on arrangements made by another person and that the natural superiority of the husband to the wife in the capacity to promote the interest of the household makes it appropriate for the law to designate him her master.

Likewise, concerning nations: When Aristotle argues in the *Politics* that because the northern barbarians lack intelligence or skill and the eastern barbarians lack

<sup>49</sup> For some incisive criticisms of Rawls's theory, see B. Barry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice: A Critical Examination of the Principal Doctrines in A Theory of Justice by John Rawls* (Oxford, 1973), and R. Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, N.J., 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Rawls himself seems to be blissfully unaware of the ideological character of his position. Whereas he did eventually begin to catch up with the eighteenth century's recognition of the profound historical mutability of ethical values in his late work *Political Liberalism*, he seems never to have begun to catch up with the nineteenth century's recognition of the ideological character of much philosophy.

spirit, whereas the Greeks have both, the Greeks should rule over the barbarians, this is a piece of false ideology serving the interests of the Greeks as a nation at the expense of the barbarian nations. Or to mention a family of less obvious cases closer to home: When many theories advanced by contemporary American philosophers fly in the face of compelling empirical evidence on the wings of specious arguments in order to claim universality for one or another aspect of psychological life – for example, Davidson in connection with beliefs and concepts generally, Quine in connection with logical laws, Hardin in connection with color-concepts, Searle in connection with illocutionary forces, Chomsky in connection with “universal grammar,” and Nussbaum in connection with ethical values<sup>51</sup> – the reasons for this probably in the end lie less in the domain of evidence and argument than in the interests of the United States as a nation in competition with other nations. For one thing, the very unusual internal composition of the United States out of different immigrant groups from diverse cultural backgrounds puts a premium on doctrines that encourage cultural uniformity, namely, in the interests of forestalling the constant danger of political disunity and the weakening of the nation in its competition with other nations that would result from it. For another thing, the insistence that everyone else’s outlook must be fundamentally the same as ours, when combined with the refractory empirical evidence of what other peoples actually say and do, generates the conclusion that they must simply have a more confused version of our own outlook (or perhaps in extreme cases no real outlook at all) – which constitutes an ideological rationalization for the manifold imperial activities of the United States around the world.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, concerning species: Like much religion (and often under its influence), much philosophy has held that human beings are sharply different from animals in one crucial way or another – Aristotle and others claiming that unlike human beings, animals lack rationality; Kant claiming that unlike human beings, animals lack self-consciousness; Descartes and his followers going as far as to claim that

<sup>51</sup> For more detailed discussion bearing on each of these cases, see my “On the Very Idea of Denying the Existence of Radically Different Conceptual Schemes,” *Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (1998): 133–85; *Wittgenstein on the Arbitrariness of Grammar* (Princeton, N.J., 2004), chap. 5; “A Wittgensteinian Anti-Platonism,” *Harvard Review of Philosophy* 15 (2009): 58–85; “Herder, Schlegel, Humboldt, and the Birth of Modern Linguistics,” in *German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond* (Oxford, 2011); and “Genealogy and Morality,” *American Dialectic* 1, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>52</sup> It is no argument against this account that some of the philosophers mentioned here fail to subscribe to the sorts of nationalistic interests in question or even work from diametrically opposed motives (as in the cases of Chomsky and Nussbaum, for instance), for recall that Marx’s theory of ideology makes no claim about the individual ideologist’s motives. To convey the point by way of an analogy: If Marx is right in thinking that the basic ideological function of Christianity in the modern world is to support the socioeconomic interests of the capitalist class against those of the working class (as he probably is), a sensible Marxist will of course nonetheless readily concede that Christianity has its sincere liberation theologians.

unlike human beings, animals have no mental life at all; a tradition that reaches from at least the eighteenth century (e.g., Süßmilch and the early Herder) up to the present day (e.g., Bennett, Davidson, and Taylor) claiming that unlike human beings, animals lack language; another tradition that stretches from at least the medieval period (e.g., Aquinas) up to the present (e.g., Huxley and Korsgaard) claiming that unlike human beings, animals quite lack morality; and so on. Moreover, such philosophy has in many cases gone on to argue explicitly, and in others to imply, that this alleged profound difference justifies various sorts of harm that human beings routinely do to animals (e.g., forcing them to labor for us, driving them out of their habitats, killing them for food or clothing or sport, and using them in animal experiments, such as vivisections).<sup>53</sup> As recent scientific work on animal cognition, language, and altruism (e.g., the work of Griffin, Savage-Rumbaugh, and de Waal) is making increasingly clear, the claims of sharp difference involved turn out to be false, or at best very dubious. Indeed, in some cases, such as the Cartesian theory, the falsehood is pretty obvious. Moreover, the explicit and implicit inferences from the alleged sharp differences in question to the propriety of harming animals are in most cases equally dubious (here the Cartesian theory would be the one clear exception). So why have these philosophical theories nonetheless enjoyed such widespread and persistent popularity? A large part of the explanation surely lies in the fact that they lend an ideological rationalization to the selfish indulgence of human beings' interests at the expense of animals'. So here again we see an example of philosophy serving as ideology supporting the interests of one group of creatures at the expense of another's by means of falsehoods.<sup>54</sup>

In short, Marx's theory that much of the history of philosophy has had the character of ideology was already illuminating under his restriction of it to socio-economic class interests, but once the theory is allowed a more flexible application that includes group interests of other sorts, it promises to become an even more powerful critical tool for understanding much of the history of philosophy.

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<sup>53</sup> For some helpful further discussion of this subject, see P. Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York, 2002), especially chap. 5.

<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that this extension of Marx's model of ideology to relations between nations, and especially to relations between species, changes the emphasis in his account of an ideology's function in a significant way: whereas he was primarily concerned with an ideology's reinforcement of the oppressed's acquiescence in their own exploitation and only secondarily, if at all, with its reinforcement of the oppressors' exploitation, here the situation is reversed.

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